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ABSTRACT

As a result of status dilemma and lack of respect from teachers, administrators, and others, the career of the Bay City public school custodian is generally characterized by horizontal mobility. Infrequently, custodians will adjust to this situation by "training" teachers or avoiding them, although they usually bid for or transfer to schools which they feel will provide satisfactory staff and community relations. Another response to status inconsistency is political activity, wherein Bay City custodians campaign for politicians in exchange for some measure of control over their working conditions and their lives in general. This monograph examines the backgrounds of the custodians and their required job skills. Both a literature review and a sociological model are used to structure a series of in-depth interviews of custodians in a city of average size. (Author/AG)

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The Career of the Bay City Public School Custodian: A Sociological Inquiry*

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ABSTRACT

The Career of The Bay City Public School Custodian: A Sociological Inquiry

As a result of status dilemma and lack of respect, the career of the Bay City Public School Custodian is characterized by horrizontal mobility. Although not as frequent a career pattern, some custodians will adjust to their existing situations by re-training teachers or avoiding them. Another response to status inconsistency is political activity. The custodians of Bay City campaign for politicians in exchange for some measure of control over their working conditions and their lives in general. In addition, the monograph examines the backgrounds of the custodians and the skills required for the position. The literature is reviewed and a sociological model is used to structure a series of in-depth interviews of custodians in a medium-sized city.

DEDICATION

To the late Thomas Shortman, President, Local 32B, Building Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO

A Humanitarian Who Set An Example For All Americans

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: A Rationale for The Study of School Custodians

> Set in the wall of the main corridor of a public school in a small city of Iowa is a bronze tablet bearing, in low relief, the heroic likeness of a man and the inscription--"He gave thirty-two years of faithful service to the youth of this community." From the dedicatory program we learn that the tablet was placed "by its hundreds of donors with the belief that all those who shall frequent these halls in the years to come will be inspired, as we who present it were inspired, by him." This superior personage, so memorialized was not a member of the board of education, he was not a superintendent; nor a principal; nor an exceptional teacher, but the school janitor or custodian . . . Here is a testimonial to the fact that the man who fires the furnace and sweeps the floors may loom in the memory of those who came under his humble ministrations as of more moment than the remaining personnel of the institution. (Rogers, 1938, p. 1)

A minority of educators and hygienists have recognized the importance of the school custodian, as the following quotations indicate:

> Ten teachers can be out of school and the school will run, but if one custodian is out, the school will not run. (Joseph L, Bay City School Board)

> In order to operate a school you need a custodian, a teacher, a head master, and pupils, in that order. (Joseph L, Bay City School Board)

> The Janitor of a modern school building is, next to the principal, perhaps the most important officer in the school. (Fletcher B. Dresslar, author of School Hygiene)

> A good janitor is harder to replace than a good teacher, and in most cases than a good principal. (Ayers, Williams and Wood, authors of Healthful Schools)
>
> Diligent and conscientious caretaking contributes much to the health and habits of children in all types of schools . . . Special care should be exercised in their selection and in the organization of their duties. (Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools, London, England.)

Social scientists and educationists have investigated most of the elements within the school system: the school board, superintendents of schools, principals, teachers, students and guidance counselors. Their choice of concerns, however, reflects a bias which leads them to neglect the elements of least prestige in the system--the "grey" people (Waller, 1965). The grey people are those in the school who are not part of the "academic house": the custodians, firemen, cafeteria workers, security guards. They represent "a veritable army of service-type employees who keep the schools operating but have no direct relationship to instruction" (Campbell, et al., 1965, p. 286). In many cities, one out of three employees is categorized as non-instructional.

Perhaps these people, who at first may seem to be on the fringes of the school, are neglected because of their lowly status. Researchers, especially those who are insecure in status, may believe that "rubbing elbows" with custodians lowers their own precarious positions. Or, they may simply be unaware of the part played by custodians in the scenario of the school. For whatever

reason, however, a perusal of the sociological, educational and administration literature reveals very few pages devoted to school custodians.

To be sure, many would find a study of school custodians interesting and informative as an example of a field study in American ethnography. Many have fond memories of the custodian from their school days. Anecdotal references to the friendly schoolhouse custodian are found in novels, movies, and even occasionally in educational literature of a more academic nature. Thus, the work of custodians appears in novels from Peyton Place to Benjamin Siegel's The Principal, which depicts the custodian as a sensitive, cultured, intellectual confidante. This introduction attempts to justify a more systematic approach to the subject.

The work of Everett Hughes and his students (known collectively as "The Chicago School" of sociology) in the sociology of occupations rests on the premise that the less prestigious occupations may be the best possible laboratories for the study of some general social phenomena:

> Perhaps there is much to be learned about the high-prestige occupations by applying to them the concepts which naturally come to mind for the study of people in the most lowly kinds of work as there is to be learned by apply ng to other occupations the conceptions developed in connection with the highly-valued professions. Furthermore, I [Professor Hughes] have come to the conclusion that it is a fruitful thing to start the study of any social phenomenon at the point of least prestige. For, since prestige is so much a

> matter of symbols, and even of pretensions--however well merited--there goes with prestige a tendency to preserve a front which hides the inside of things: a front of names, of indirection, of secrecy (much of it necessary secrecy). On the other hand, in things of less prestige, the core may be more easy of access. (Hughes, 1958, pp. 48-49)

This comparative framework becomes more concrete with an illustration of its usefulness. Imagine that a researcher is interested in studying the role and adjustments of guidance counselors in the schools. Obscuring and diverting attention away from the essential characteristics and functions of counselors are their symbolic trappings--the "mystery" and "magic" associated with controlling unseen and elusive mental forces, the untranslatable rhetoric which characterizes their work ("percentiles," "standard deviations, " "WISC," "WAIS," etc.) and the methods and techniques not understood by other school personnel (I Q tests, personality inventories, psychotherapy, non-directive counseling, etc.). Consideration of the custodian may lead to a clearer understanding of the counselor. For example, the custodian also deals with unseen forces: he controls the <u>heat</u> in the school building. If something goes wrong, he has at his command <u>magic</u> words such as "insufficient boiler pressure" and "PH water concentration." In the same way, a guidance counselor may attribute events he has not foreseen or cannot understand to "personality syndromes," and "functional disorders of unknown etiology." The custodian tinkers with machines, such as

oil burners, ventilating systems, and electrical relays. Because no one else in the building understands these machines, nobody knows whether he is repairing some defect or simply wasting time to avoid some other duty. Similarly, the day to day work of the counselor is not regulated: no one in the school has a detailed knowledge of his tools and their use.

There are other justifications for the allocation of time and effort to the study of school custodians. If we, as social scientists, believe that the school is indeed a social system in which the elements mutually influence each other, then we ought to consider all elements in that system. The system assumption indicates a priori that custodians influence teachers, students and administrators, and vice versa. A major portion of this essay, therefore, deals with the social transactions or staff relations between custodians and other elements in the school system: principals, teachers, students, and parents who are on the periphery of the system.

We also assume that the school as a system is influenced by external sub-systems in society: by unions, municipal government, voluntary associations, etc. The custodians form a link between the school system nd some of these sub-systems, through their membership in associations and unions, as taxpayers, and as parents. According to Waller (1965, p. 80), the school custodian is a major link between the school system and the outside community:

> Largely this disproportionate importance of the janitor is derived from the fact that the janitor is always a member of the local community, whereas teachers belong rather to the outside world. The primary groups and compact social units of the community stand behind the janitor; although these groups are not always powerful, they are sometimes more than any teacher can mobilize in his own interest.

Thus, a major portion of the essay deals with custodial politics, since the relationship between the schools and the community is mediated by the custodians through their union and Association activities.

The custodian is also interesting to students of social stratification. He is an example of what some sociologists call the status inconsistent person. Gold (1950, p. 7) describes the "status dilemma" of the apartment house janitor who earns more money than his tenants; this dilemma is experienced by school custodians who earn as much as or more than many teachers:

> In many cases, the janitor's income is higher than the income of his tenants. His income is obviously on the middle class level and his self-conceptions are oriented to the middle class. Nevertheless, the tenants continue to regard the janitor not as a respectable person, but as an occupational type, a mobile part of the building always at their beck and call. The janitor's efforts to be respected by the tenants for what he thinks he is, when viewed against this background of status and income differentials, are seen to give rise to personal and social dilemmas of especial sociological interest.

Researchers in education tend to find the concept of role far more useful than the concept of status, probably because Neal Gross, Jacob Getzels and Egon Guba have developed sophisticated research

strategies and models to deal with roles and role conflict. But other than in studies of the socio-economic status of pupils, the concept of status has not generated much interest among educational researchers. Yet the status of individuals--their standing in a group relative to other groups--may precondition the expectations other adults hold. We are startled by the phenomena of male secretaries, lady physicians, and female school superintendents. Thus, the school custodians represent an archetype example of a phenomena known as status dilemma or status inconsistency--membership in an occupation regarded as low status but performance of life styles (i. e., income) rather higher than popular opinion would countenance. Thus, "lowly" custodians with high incomes are "startling" and present a unique opportunity to study occupational status.

There is a growing body of literature on the theory of status inconsistency which suggests hypotheses which may be tested by a study of custodians. Additionally, these discussions of status inconsistency are heuristic because they offer insights and perspectives on custodians gained from investigations of other status inconsistent groups such as Mafia leaders (high on economic status and low in occupational prestige) and Negro college professors (high on occupational prestige and low on racial status). Thus, the knowledge that status inconsistent Negro college professors are politically conservative under certain conditions, might lead us to inquire about the political activities of school custodians. If

we find similarities between custodians and other inconsistent groups, we have contributed to the development of sociological theory in general and stratification theory in particular.

There is one final justification for the study of custodians, which may be of dubious value, but which nevertheless should be mentioned in the interests of completeness. Gold (1950) gives the following account of the origin of his research interest in apartment house custodians:

> This study was conceived about two years ago when a friend and I were discussing some of the techniques used by Hitler in gaining and enforcing power over the German people. One move that Hitler had made seemed particularly interesting. When Hither first came into power, he organized a force of secret police, called the Gestapo. Recognizing that Janitors are in a good position to know a great deal about the tenants, Hitler recruited janitors to form the nucleus of the Gestapo. Apparently many janitors were more than willing to be placed in a position which would enable them to avenge the social deprivations which they had suffered at the hands of their tenants. The janitors of Germany were ready for a social upheaval of Hitler's brand, and Hitler was shrewd enough to use them where they could do him the most good. . . . We then began to speculate over the possibility that janitors in the United States are equally ready for <u>der Tag</u>.

Needless to say, Gold's fears were not justified. However, Sorokin (1962, p. 294) hypothesizes that "riots, revolts, conquests, revolutions, wars or radical social reform movements" are initiated and supported by the attempts of status inconsistent individuals to realign their relative positions. Lenski (1966, p. 409) states:

> On the basis of limited (systematic) studies. . . one would hesitate to say that this hypothesis is much more than interesting speculation. However, there is a considerable body of unsystematic evidence to support it.

Although we might not expect school custodians to be the nucleus of a revolution, any investigation of them should, therefore, include some reference to their political activities and beliefs.

Chapter 2: A Sociological Framework For The Study of School Custodians

The perspective used throughout this study is based on the concept of career. Everyone, from the low status custodian to the respected physician, has a career:

> Career, the word itself had a career. Once a racecourse, career came to mean figuratively a short gallop at full speed, even a charge of cavalry; the swift flight of a bird in hawking and the course of the sun and stars across the sky; hence, also full speed or impetus. These meanings, all obsolete, have given place to this: "A person's course of progress through life or a distinct portion of life." A more special meaning is: "A profession affording opportunities for advancement," and in a still narrower sense, and without adjectives, it refers--in both English and French--to the taking up of diplomatic service as a permanent calling. Our subject is career in the broad sense of a person's course through life, and especially through that portion of his life in which he works. That portion, however, cannot be understood apart from the whole. In our sense, everyone has a career. (Hughes, unpublished mimeographed paper, 4pp., n. d.)

Thus the first task is to examine the job itself, the kinds of men who take on custodial work, and their work histories. This will be found in Part II, which is entitled, "The Job and the Men."

The next step in arriving at a sociological perspective of custodians is answering the question: what is sociologically distinctive about the position of the custodian? Gold's study of apartment house janitors suggests the answer--"status dilemma," a

structural differential in the status (prestige) and the income associated with a position. Gold (1950) carefully describes the interpersonal conflict between apartment house custodians who want to be respected and their middle class tenants who refer to them derisively as "janitors." Similarly, the status dilemma of the school custodian is reflected in his complaint that, like the comedian Rodney Dangerfield, he "gets no respect." As we will show, custodians "get no respect" from the community, teachers, parents, and the builders of schools (architects). Problematic situations orbit around the status dilemma outlined by Gold: the custodian's efforts to be respected by others for what he thinks he is, when viewed against the background of status (prestige) and income differentials. His public image as an overpaid, unskilled, degenerate, broom pusher is not congruent with his own self conceptions.

The final step in forming a sociological perspective of the custodian is answering the question: what are the sociological alternatives or solutions to status dilemma and its resulting disrespect? Since the solutions of custodians to their predicament are worked out in their career patterns, an analysis of the concept "career" helps to answer this question. Therefore, we digress a moment to discuss careers and then return to the adjustments of the Bay City school custodians.

In its narrow sense, career refers to the "patterned series

of adjustments made by the individual to the 'network of institutions, formal organizations, and informal relationships' (Hall, 1948, p. 327; quoted in Becker) in which the work of the occupation is performed" (Becker, 1952, p. 470). Becker (1952) points out that traditional research in this area focuses on the movement of the individual from one position to another, along a vertical dimension of ranked positions. By concentrating on vertical mobility, however, we tend to ignore "the horizontal aspects of the career: movement among the positions available at one level of such a hierarchy" (Becker, 1952, p. 470). The careers of big-city school teachers, for example, typically follow such a pattern. While relatively few teachers become principals or superintendents (vertical mobility), many transfer from one school to another (horizontal mobility). They tend to move in patterned ways among . . . possible positions, seeking that situation which affords the most desirable setting in which to meet and grapple with the basic problems of their work" (Becker, 1952, p. 470).

We now return to the status dilemma of the custodian. The solutions or adjustments to status dilemma and its concomitant lack of respect become clear when we examine this career pattern--horizontal mobility--of the Bay City school custodians. In this career mode, the custodian typically moves from school to school seeking pleasant staff relations in response to status dilemma and disrespect. The observation of this movement is made within the context

of intra-system analysis, since it takes place within the social system of the school. This pattern of movement within the school system is discussed in Part III, entitled, "Horizontal Mobility."

There i , in addition, an alternative adjustment to the predicament of status dilemma and disrespect: union activity. This is seen in the wider context of inter-system analysis, as the custodian interacts with social systems outside of the school. As we pointed out above, career means "movement through life" or a "person's course of progress through life." Therefore, membership in voluntary organizations (such as social clubs, unions, churches), friendship networks, geographical location, consumption patterns--or any patterned sequences of behavior which occur outside of the work situation--is considered part of one's career. Often non-work aspects of career infringe on behavior and relationships in the work situation. For example, union membership or tax paying status enables a worker to sponsor legislation which affects his working conditions or hi. job definition.

Thus, union activity is another kind of career pattern which serves as an adjustment or solution to perceived status dilemma and disrespect. In this mode of behavior, the individual attempts to change the structural arrangements of society that cause his status (prestige) and income differential. One goal of this "political" activity is to transform the ongoing social order into one in which there is high prestige associated with "labor," and the status of

"intellectuals" is downgraded. In this way, people in status dilemma not only eliminate their dilemma, but also avenge the social wrongs they have suffered at the hands of the higher ranked members of society. Of course, custodians in Bay City are neither on the verge of revolution nor incipient fascists. They do, however, engage in political behavior that directly or indirectly reduces their status differential and increases their prestige in the eyes of teachers and the community. This career pattern is discussed in Part IV, entitled, "Custodial Politics."

Chapter 3: The Literature

The recognition of the importance of school custodians has inspired three national surveys, one as early as 1915 by Deffenbaugh, another by Garber in 1922 and a third by Rogers in 1938. We discuss only Garber's study because his observations are not substantially different from those of the other researchers. In the reference section at the end of this paper, we list several books on educational administration, containing anywhere from a page to a chapter about custodians. Each text emphasizes the importance of the custodian not only as a man who cleans the schools but as a man who affects the social habits and values of those with whom he comes into contact, especially the children. Also stressed is the importance of the custodian in the community. None of these books, however, systematically examines these areas of interest or presents any but the most anecdotal evidence for their recommendations to administrators of custodian services. A few excerpts from these works illustrate their areas of concern:

> Cultivate the good will of the janitor. He may become a friend in need. (Viles, 1941, p. 8)
>
> The janitor who does his work well contributes much to the efficiency of the school system. (Viles, 1941, p.9)
>
> The janitors must be treated with respect, and while one may be friendly with them, relations must be on a dignified plane. (Linn, et al., 1948, p. 7)

> The custodian should use common sense and discretion when talking about school matters among his family and friends. . . . the stories he might tell could embarrass teachers, principals, or school officials and cause trouble that could have been avoided. (Linn, 1948, p. 9)

> Teachers do a better job of teaching and pupils do a better job of learning when they are comfortable, happy and generally satisfied with their surroundings. When a custodian's work is well done and his attitude is cheerful and helpful, he is helping to make teachers and pupils happier and better able to carry out their tasks. (Linn, et. al., 1948, p. 3)

> The Buildings and Grounds Department is in a position to contribute toward building good will for the school through service. Employees who are courteous and agreeable and who do their work well gain the respect of pupils, faculty and visitors. But if these employees can promote good will, they also are in a position to cause ill will through questionable attitudes, actions, appearance and workmanship. (Linn, et. al., 1948, pp. 388-89)

Garber's (1922) national survey of school custodial services was motivated by a consideration of five features of the custodian's job that he believed were not only important to the functioning of the school, but were largely unnoticed by school officials. These are as follows:

1) Safeguarding Valuable Property

The school custodian is responsible for a multi-million dollar building which contains expensive heating and other mechanical equipment. Yet the man with these grave responsibilities is often untrained, underpaid, ill-respected; he is seldom considered important enough to be the subject of research.

2) Setting Housekeeping Standards

The custodian is responsible for making and keeping the school and its immediate surroundings clean, neat, and attractive. Garber (1922) recognizes the importance of cleanliness and orderliness as a learning experience for the children in a school:

> Obviously, one of the school's chief duties is to inculcate in our children a taste for neatness and cleanliness, as well as in the intelligent understanding of their importance. This should be done both by precept and example . . . . It is certain that the conditions under which children live in these schoolhouses for 5 days a week, for 8 or 12 years, have much to do with establishing their own standards and habits of cleanliness and order. (Garber, 1922, p. 4)

3) The Moral Influence of the Custodian

Children who are at very critical and impressionable ages spend a great deal of time in school buildings. While the children are developing physically, they are acquiring values and standards of conduct:

> The janitors who preside over these school buildings necessarily come in close and intimate association with teachers and pupils. . . . The reports received show that in 60 per cent of the cities the janitors have direct responsibility for discipline of pupils upon school premises. This responsibility extends all the way from merely reporting misdemeanors and irregularities to teachers and principals, to general supervision and authority at all times. In many cases, the janitor has the same authority as teachers for discipline during school hours. . . . No teacher in a school comes into more vital contact with the boys than the janitor, especially in and around boys' toilets, in basements, in corridors, and on the grounds.

4) Control of Health Conditions

The knowledge and efficiency with which the custodian performs his duties affect the safety and health of all those in the school building. He not only controls the heating, but he performs other vital sanitary functions as well. He controls the moisture, dust and humidity of the air--factors which influence the bacteria and other harmful content of the air. Dirty windows prevent proper lighting and may cause eyestrain. A dirty and messy school may lead to low morale of those who occupy the building, and so on.

5) Fire Hazards and Safety

> Perhaps the most important matter resting upon the janitor in connection with his management and care of the school plant, is his responsibility in relation to fire hazards and safety. (Garber, 1922, p. 6)

The careless custodian can be the cause of conflagrations in schools which endanger the lives of all occupants of the building. Overheated furnaces, carelessness in firing the boiler, leaky gas pipes, spontaneous combustion in rag piles, etc., are some of the most common causes of fires in schools--a careful and conscientious custodian can eliminate these hazards.

Much of this information is necessary to an understanding of the problems associated with the custodian's job, and yet it is known by very few educational administrators. For example, how many know that as recently as thirty-five years ago, in some communities

the school custodian was actually required to live on the premises of the school, in an appropriate basement apartment or shack on the building's roof. In earlier years the custodian was often directly responsible to the principal of the school. Today, the custodian is one of the few individuals in the school who is not directly under the principal's authority. He is controlled by the school buildings department, which is usually responsible to the school board or the superintendent of schools. Twenty years ago many city school custodians were given one large sum of money with which to buy cleaning materials and hire assistants. By cutting corners and hiring less help than was needed, some custodians earned over $30,000 a year. And finally, few administrators know the meaning and origin of the terms "janitor" and "custodian":

> The term janitor had for its ancestor a word meaning doorkeeper or porter, while custodian refers to a guardian or keeper. (Rogers, 1938, p. 2)

A change in the perceptions and duties required of the janitor is reflected in earlier publications which describe the job of the "janitor," while more recent monographs and articles refer to the school "custodians":

> We have therefore placed on the cover of this publication the more appropriate title 'custodian,' for in most schools the janitor or janitor-engineer is responsible for the physical, and less directly, for the mental and moral welfare of every man, woman, and child in the school. (Rogers, 1938, p. 2)

We conclude that while a few investigators (such as Rogers, 1938) give school custodians the recognition that they deserve for their hygienic and moral functions in the school, even fewer authors of text-books in educational administration have shown an interest in these studies. This literature contains many "leads" which social scientists and educators have failed to follow-up; there are no systematic studies of the interactions between custodians and teachers, students, members of the outside community, school boards, etc. Perhaps this monograph will fill these gaps and indicate the importance and feasibility of continuing this kind of career research.

Chapter 4: Background of The Present Study

This monograph presents the findings of an interview study of custodians in the high schools of a city we shall call Bay City. In-depth interviews lasting from one and one-half to three hours were conducted with 25 Bay City Custodians. In addition, we had discussions with the Head Custodian, several officials of the Custodians' Association, and the many custodians and government officials attending the custodians' annual banquet. The custodial department employs 480 custodians and four supervisors; it is directed by the Head Custodian. They are responsible for the maintenance of 197 school buildings, and the School Board and truant offices in an eastern city of approximately 700,000 people.

Gold (1950) quickly learned in his study of apartment house janitors that it is not easy to interview custodians. Armed with a letter of introduction from the vice-president of the custodian's union in Chicago, Gold was regarded as everything but a social scientist; he was accused of being an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a union organizer, a newspaper reporter, and a "stool pigeon" (or informer) for the union. Unable to gain entrance to their buildings, he sought out janitors at their "hangouts," and interviewed them in bars and lunchrooms.

I had better luck than Gold. I was armed with a letter from

the president of the Building Service Employees International Union (BSEIU), AFL-CIO, stating that I was a student at Harvard University and was interested in the problems of custodians. It asked the custodian to "please" grant me an interview. Innocently, I walked into a very sensitive situation. Several years ago, the custodians in the Bay City school system had walked out of a BSEIU local to form their own association. As a result, the men were very hostile towards unions in general, and the Building Service International Employees Union in particular. I was therefore regarded with more than a little suspicion by many of the men. But I had two marks in my favor. One was that I worked my way through college as a member of the custodians' union in New York City. The Bay City custodians believed, therefore, that I was sympathetic to the working man and was not interested in writing an "expose." Secondly, as it turned out, at least five of my interviewees had remained in BSEIU. I interviewed ten senior high school custodians who had an average of twenty-five or thirty years on the job. Although only thirty custodians had remained in BSEIU, many of the BSEIU members were "old timers," and thus were disproportionately represented in the sample of custodians. They were pleased to talk with someone connected with the BSEIU.

The custodial supervisors and the chief schoolhouse custodian, Mr. McC, regarded me with suspicion. At the outset of the study, I did not intend to interview Mr. McC. However, one custodian, after

refusing to speak with me unless I received the permission of the chief, called Mr. McC to tell him I was "nosing around" the schools. I then saw Mr. McC, and we had a very cordial conversation. He said I would have his full cooperation, provided he could inspect my writing before it was published. The next day, I learned from a custodian that Mr. McC, despite his promise of cooperation, had ordered all his men not to show me around the schools or to tell me anything unless he was present! Fortunately I had already completed all interviews by the time his directive was issued. But word travels fast when someone is interviewing custodians! The morning before I spoke with Mr. McC, I interviewed a custodian on the steps of his school building. A supervisor, making a tour of the school, came up to me and without any introduction said: "You must be Rafky. I've heard about you."

The school principals were also suspicious. The custodian mentioned above, was interviewed [redacted] in front of his school building while the principal stood in the doorway watching us. This was one of the "powerful" custodians who was president of the association in 1968. He didn't care if the principal saw him speaking leisurely with someone during working hours. Other custodians were more cautious, however. One insisted that I come and see him during his lunch hour, so that the principal could not claim he was neglecting his duties during working hours. In another school, the principal actually followed the custodian and me as we walked down the hallway, and he looked

as if he were trying to overhear our conversation. In another school, the custodian had left word with the office secretary that he was expecting a visitor and that I should be escorted to his office. Upon arrival, the secretary asked me several times what business I had with the custodian and whom I represented. I told her that the matter was personal, but she continued to question me.

There is one final point I should make. Most of the custodians I interviewed were "day men." The night workers seem to be a different "breed" with different interests. They are not particularly interested in children, and have little contact with children, teachers, principals, or parents. They do much of the heavy work that cannot be accomplished during the day when the school is crowded. Therefore, any generalizations about custodians drawn from this study, probably do not apply to night workers. In addition, the reader should be cautious before extrapolating the results to day-time custodians in other areas of the country without considering regional differences as well as the differences in school systems. Most likely, however, our findings about the career patterns, staff-relations, and political activity of custodians are general in their application. This is likely because the low status of custodians, their adaptations, and problems are universal.

PART II: CAREER I--VERTICAL MOBILITY

Chapter 5: The Job and The Men

People tend to think of the custodian as a "broom-pusher," and a bum, someone with no marketable skills and a dubious moral position in the community. But, a glance at the formal duties required of custodians by school systems reveals a wide range of prescribed vocational skills and personal attributes. The Civil Service Examination requires that Bay City public school custodians demonstrate:

> knowledge of the proper display of the flag of the United States of America; ability to maintain harmonious working relationships; neat appearance; good moral character.

Much of the work involves maintenance and operation of hand-fired or oil-fired heating systems (gravity indirect, forced indirect, or direct) including such work as:

> starting and keeping of fires under control for the keeping of rooms at required temperatures; the cleaning of boiler tubes, fires and ashpit; the daily testing of the safety valve; the daily blowing down of the boiler and the checking of the gauge glass and water column; the checking of the valves controlling steam and taking necessary precautions for preventing heating system coils, valves and pipes from freezing, involving the use of slice bar, fire hoe, devil's claw, tube scraper and wire brush.

Keeping the school clean involves a certain degree of expert

knowledge on the custodian's part. He needs:

> knowledge of the methods, materials, tools and equipment used in building custodial work, including a knowledge of waxes, polishes, detergents and other cleaners and their proper use on various surfaces; knowledge of the composition and characteristics of the various kinds of floors to be cleaned in school buildings, such as, wood, linoleum, concrete, marble, ceramic tile, magnesite, asphalt, rubber tile, cork tile, terrazzo, travertine; walls, such as marble, tile plaster, brick, plywood, painted burlap.

The custodian knows how to do minor repair work and preventive maintenance. He can service and care for:

> desks, doorchecks, window shades, bubblers and flushometers, blown fuses and burnt out lamps, vacuum cleaners, floor machines, floor brushes, ventilating equipment, plumbing, heating and electrical fixtures.

In addition, the custodian must know fire and accident prevention procedures and equipment, including the operation and care of the various kinds of hand extinguishers.

He must also be familiar with such devices as:

> boilers, thermostats, controls, steam traps, damper regulators; one pipe, two pipe, gravity, vacuum, and gravity indirect steam heating systems; fans, unit ventillators.

He is also a gardener, responsible for:

> the care and maintenance of grounds, of the buildings, such as the trimming of shrubbery and lawns, the watering of plants and lawns, and the removal

> of snow from walks and paths, requiring the use of hand and power lawn mowers, hedge clippers, grass whips, snow shovels, ice irons and mechanical plows.

To be eligible for a job as a school custodian, a man must pass a civil service examination. The applicant is then put on an appointment list. When there is an opening in one of the schools, he is given the position of junior custodian at the lowest pay step. There are 240 junior custodians in the Bay City schools. The ambitious junior may take another examination for promotion to one of the 44 positions of permanent intermittent senior (P.I.). When a senior opening occurs, he is appointed to one of the 193 positions of senior custodian. Four supervisory positions (assistants to the chief school house custodian) and the position of chief school house custodian are also attainable by civil service examination; however, the senior custodian has little chance of promotion since he must wait for one of the five men to retire, regardless of his score on the civil service examination.

The lowest pay is for civil service grade 17, and the highest grade a senior custodian can reach is grade 27, which pays a maximum salary of $199 a week. The chief school house custodian draws an annual salary of $17,000.

The Civil Service Commission administers the examination in a fair and impartial manner. Anyone who takes the test has a right to examine his paper after it is graded and to dispute the score.

Many custodians believe that a lucky applicant can guess many of the answers to the multiple choice questions. At one time, the test consisted of fill-in type questions and guessing was quite hazardous.

The examination covers those skills in the job description presented above. One obstacle to preparing for the examination is the problem of "standardization of treatments." Not all custodial textbooks and manuals agree on the proper treatments and repairs. For example, a U. S. Army manual states that abrasives should be used as the "treatment" to polish brass; the manual published by the U. S. Navy disagrees. In addition, often the proper treatment depends on the location of the school; cleaning agents which are appropriate for schools near the shore may not be used in inland schools, due to different climatic conditions. The Civil Service Commission is flexible about the standardization of treatments. If a custodian can prove to their satisfaction that his answer to a question agrees with that of a "recognized" authority or "recognized" manual, they will give him credit for it.

Several universities, Nebraska and Michigan, for example, give home study courses to prepare custodians for Civil Service examinations. The examination preparation developed by the Bay State Education Department combines classroom and correspondence instruction. One custodian, however, attended a three-week seminar at Columbia University Teachers College at his own expense in order to improve his skills.

Some men use other methods to prepare for the examinations.

One course is given by a moonlighting assistant principal: according to an informant:

> He rents American Legion halls and gives several civil service courses. One week he gives a custodial course, then another week he'll give a course for the Registry [of motor vehicles]. They are probably not too good. He has an "in" with the civil service and he has past questions and answers. He charges for the course, but rumor has it that this may be his last year of operation.

Local trade schools offer courses which are not geared to the Civil Service Examination, but after a comprehensive course in steam engineering, the applicant needs to learn only the building codes and a few other details to pass the custodians examination. Finally, some custodians have formed study groups among themselves, and they are reputed to be effective.

The test, however, is only one criterion for appointment as a custodian. A "good moral character" is also necessary. A custodian points out:

> The Civil Service is more particular about custodians than they are about policemen, firemen and even teachers. We get a police check even more thorough than policemen get because we are around children and women teachers.

One final requirement--which is now optional--must be mentioned: that is the "license." Years ago, although the law did not require licenses to attend low pressure boilers, the school board did.

Although this requirement has now been eliminated, a custodian states:

> But some old timers have licenses as low pressure boiler operators and as firemen and oilers. Today the younger men say, why get them if you don't need them?

The "old-timers" feel that their licenses are a measure of their competence, and they are very proud of them. There are, however, five schools among the approximately 200 in the Bay City system that do require special licenses because of unusual equipment. For example, equipment in the Bay City Trade School requires an operator with a second class engineer's license. Therefore, the custodian holding one of these licenses can pass someone higher on the seniority list to bid for one of these five schools. The process of "bidding" or placing one's name on a list from which men are chosen to fill vacancies in a particular school, is explained below.

There are two main "feeder" patterns into the occupation of school custodian: one characterizes the career movement of the older seniors and the other describes the careers of the younger juniors.

Most of the older men have spent the majority of their working careers as school custodians. When they were in high school, they were employed on a part-time basis as contract labor by their school custodian in order to supplement family income. More often than not, they were employed by a close relative, such as an uncle or father. Some typical careers of the older men are described below:

> I never did anything else. I started as a kid working for my uncle who was a school custodian.
>
> As a kid I helped the custodian sweep the school yard for a buck a week. When I was twelve I was making three dollars a week and after high school I worked full-time for a school custodian.
>
> I began at eight or nine [years old] by helping a janitor. I then became a custodian after I graduated high school. My father was in it for forty-three years and I worked for him as a helper.

A few of the senior custodians did work at other jobs before they became custodians, but typically they entered the occupation after only a short period of other kinds of employment. They were motivated by "stories" about the high pay of custodians:

> After high school I worked on a truck. A friend of my father told me that custodians make more money than truck helpers and so I became a custodian.
>
> I worked in a wood finishing place that made school furniture. People would come in and say how the janitor made a lot of money. That's how I heard about the job.
>
> I worked in a grocery store as a clerk across the street from the Bunker Hill school. I got friendly with the school janitor. I heard that it was one of the best jobs there was. At that time the job had prestige--the custodians made more money than police and firemen. I remember the Major at the time saying that the city [blue collar] workers were the aristocrats of the working class. I took the physical for the job in my military uniform and I think that it helped me pass.

While the seniors mention salary as their initial interest in the job, they also note three other factors: desire to be around

children, interest in maintenance work, and the need to be one's "own boss." These three factors motivated the older men to stay on the job, especially since World War II when the contract system changed over to Civil Service and the salaries of custodians declined relative to those of other city employees. The salience of these needs is expressed below:

> One advantage of the job is that you can arrange your work to your own desires. You can do what you want when you want, and there's no one breathing down your neck. There's no pressure, if you want to sit down for a smoke it's O.K. [For example?] You are supposed to come in at 7:30 in the morning and sweep the lots with all the teacher's cars in them. So I come in before seven when they are empty and sweep because it's a lot easier to clean. I go home a half hour early.
>
> One reason I like the job is because I'm interested in maintenance work. I like fixing things.
>
> It is really important to like kids and put up with them. You treat them like they were your own and like you would want others to treat your kids. We have a responsibility to these kids--to protect them. When I was in an elementary school if a kid throws up or gets "messed up" you help the teacher clean him because you would appreciate it if others did this for your kid. Once I evacuated the Girls Trade School when a gas stove blew up. You've got to like kids to stay on this job.

The career patterns, motivation for taking the job and for staying on the job are different for the younger, junior custodians. Typically, they entered the occupation late in their working careers, being anywhere from 38 to 50 years old when starting to work for the

school department. They have had a wide range of jobs before becoming custodians, many in the highly paid defense and construction industries. The main reason that they have left higher paying jobs to become custodians is "security." The younger men mention this again and again. They express little interest in children, maintenance work, or being their "own boss." The best that they have to say about custodial work is that it does not include the pressures of the assembly line or the strenuousness of heavy industry. The statements below by young, junior custodians illustrate their career patterns:

> I heard from friends that the job was steady with no lay-offs. I left the Navy Yard when it closed. There was too much pressure there. I heard that the custodians took it easy and didn't work too hard.
>
> I was making twice what I am making now in an electronics plant. But there was no security and no pension. We were always being laid off. I saw hard times coming and I wanted a steady job even if I did make less.
>
> I was a mechanic. In 1948 I decided that I wanted security so I became a custodian. I heard about the job from a friend.
>
> I was a plumber's helper and my brother worked for the schools. It looked like a good job and it had security. The pension looked good and it had vacation and sick pay. The advantages outweighed the disadvantages.
>
> I was in construction previously. This was hard work and I wasn't getting any younger. My brother was a custodian and so I decided to try it.
>
> I started late and there isn't much of a pension. But it's better than nothing. With this and my social

> security I can survive. I'd recommend the job to my friends if they didn't have a trade or a job they were interested in or if they had no particular future plans.

There is little turnover in the Bay City School Custodial Department. The chief custodian estimates that only ten or twelve men enter or leave his department each year. Some men leave because they have to wait too long for the "good" jobs to open up, i. e., the senior positions in high school. Others leave because they do not like the "image" of the job and are ashamed of being a custodian. Some leave for other city Civil Service jobs such as building and ~~boiler~~ inspectors. For example, one custodian pointed out:

> A custodian can enter the service and engineering department. If he was a plumber before he became a custodian, he already knows this trade. Then all he has to do is learn the building codes and some other things and he can get this job.

While some custodians resign for other city jobs, few city workers transfer to the custodial department. One reason that some people want to--at least temporarily--join the custodial department is to "use the job." The former president of the Custodian's Association had this to say about such men:

> Some men use the job to study or qualify for other jobs. Some become lawyers, real estate brokers, renovators, boiler inspectors, work for the registry /of motor vehicles/, teachers and policemen--almost everything you can imagine. Some leave for more money and some leave for more freedom. /Freedom?/ They don't like being cooped up in the same building all day long.

Several men worked their way through college and law school on the job. Not all of them, however, left after graduation. There are five men with college degrees working as custodians and supervisors who intend to "stay with the job." They insist that they enjoy their work; some have invested so many years toward their pensions that they have more to gain than to lose by staying on the job. This researcher was startled by the sophistication of some of these men. It is not unusual to find a copy of the New York Times lying on their desks along with several "best-selling" books. One custodian, who goes to the opera regularly, comfortably initiated conversation on the following subjects: The Moynihan Report, ethnically homogenous areas and their effects on neighborhood schools, race relations, the professionalization of teachers, and differences in the child rearing practices between Chinese-American and Negro families. Another custodian lectures regularly at the Henry George School of Economics! And finally, one custodian who did not attend college was a semifinalist for a year long fellowship at the Harvard Business School. He lost out to a Bay City fireman!

PART III: CAREER II--HORIZONTAL MOBILITY OR STAFF RELATIONS

Chapter 6: Good Schools and Bad Schools

We have seen that there is only insignificant attrition of custodians from the custodial department. Fewer than fifteen men leave the department each year for other Civil Service positions or jobs in private industry. Only once in recent years has a man left the department for a non-Civil Service government position, i.e., for a patronage job.

There is, however, great movement of men within the custodial department. Many men who have difficulty getting along with co-workers "bounce around" from school to school. Other men have found a congenial environment and remain in a school for several years. We describe this movement within the school system as horizontal mobility.

Custodians may "bid" or ask for a position at any school in which there is a vacancy for custodian. Those who have been in the system for many years have preference. There is no legal basis for this exercise of seniority, but the unwritten rules would probably be upheld in court. They were instituted at the insistence of the men themselves because of favoritism that previously governed school assignments. There also is an informal merit system which operates in addition to the formal bidding for positions. One custodian describes the system as follows:

> There is a kind of merit system. Suppose a custodian is a nut or just no good at his job. Suppose he applies for a job which is just too much for him. [In what way?] The job may need a man with a real good knowledge of ventillating systems, and this man may not know anything about them. So the custodians police each other. Another custodian who knows the job and the man may tell him: "You don't really want to go there." He will try to sweettalk him out of it. [But suppose the man insists on bidding for the job, and he gets it?] Well, he wouldn't last too long. He would probably be bidding off in about six weeks because he would see himself that he couldn't do the work.

The main reason that custodians bid for certain schools is "financial." The larger schools pay more money than the smaller schools, and men working in the high schools earn more than custodians in the elementary schools. A custodian can therefore increase his salary substantially by bidding successfully for a large high school. There are, however, only about fourteen high schools out of a total of 200 schools in the system, and so the chances of getting to a high school are remote.

Custodians will also bid for schools which involve less work at their present salary. For example, one custodian I spoke with bid off a school that had sixteen rooms and paid $129 a week and accepted a position at another school that had ten rooms and paid the same salary. In terms of work load, custodians avoid schools with large basements, because they are difficult to keep clean. Schools that are heated by coal are avoided because "no one wants to shovel it." I have met men who have been in the system for twenty-five years and have never seen a coal fire. Through careful bidding, they have

avoided the (approximately) 100 schools which still use coal. It is in fact easier for juniors than seniors to be selective in their bidding: since there are not many openings for seniors, "you have to take what you can get."

Some custodians bid for schools closer to their homes. Others try to avoid girls' schools for two reasons. First, as we discuss in detail later, there is the potential for embarassing situations in girls' schools such as accidental entrance into locker rooms. Secondly, girls are unable to help the custodian with his work. In a boys' school, a custodian can always ask one of the students to help him move a piece of furniture or carry heavy teaching materials from one part of the building to another. Most custodians bid in such a way that they avoid schools that are racially explosive. They do not want to work in schools where there are large numbers of Negro and white students because of the possibility of violence. All-Negro schools are also eschewed, but less often than integrated schools.

Three other motives for horizontal mobility, discussed in greater detail below, are vandalism, interpersonal problems with teachers and principals, and personal conflicts between the custodians themselves. To a lesser extent, dissatisfaction with the people in the neighborhood also causes movement; this is discussed in a later section dealing with the custodian and the neighborhood.

Chapter 7: Seniors Versus Juniors

Men bid off schools not only because they cannot "get along" with the teachers and principal, but also because they have interpersonal problems with the other members of the custodial staff. Some seniors cannot "get along" with their junior co-workers, and both may have problems with the custodial department supervisors.

Most of the men believe that the chief schoolhouse custodian is neither loyal to the custodians nor sympathetic to their problems, but owes allegiance to the man who appointed him. Mr. McC was appointed chief schoolhouse custodian before that office became a Civil Service position. When the Civil Service rules were inaugurated, Mr. McC took the examination and scored higher than four competitors; he was reappointed. He readily admits that his first loyalty is to the man who recommended him for chief schoolhouse custodian. The men are aware that his interests lie outside the department. One said:

> McCaffrey doesn't fight for the men and their rights with the school board. [For example?] He won't fight for vacuum cleaners to remove soot from the coal shutes and bins.

Of course, it would do a custodian little good to bid off a school if he does not like the chief. But he can bid off a school to avoid one of the four custodial supervisors. The custodians

believe that two of the supervisors are either jealous of custodians or feel superior to them, and this accounts for the majority of interpersonal problems between the two groups. The following comments illustrate the themes of perceived jealousy and superiority:

> If you play up to the supervisor you can take a long lunch hour, and if the building is presentable he won't complain if you leave a little early at night. Lately they have been pressing us because they think we earn too much money and they want to keep us here till the last minute.
>
> When these supervisors were custodians they were lightweights. Now they're high and mighty. They are jealous of the five and ten dollar raises we have been getting each of the last three or four years.
>
> A sign fell off the front of my building last week, and it's been down since then. To show he was a big man, he [the supervisor] said that I wasn't worth twenty cents in front of the other men. He should have told me on the side.

Some senior custodians have interpersonal problems with their juniors and vice versa. If these problems become too intense or erupt too frequently, one of the combatants will bid off the school. The following statements illustrate problematic situations from the perspective of juniors:

> If we have a problem with the principal, sure the senior can't do much about it. But if he is a good senior, he will speak up for you. But some seniors won't do this and they are strictly out for themselves.

> Sometimes a senior is an eager beaver and he works the tails off his junior men so that he can get all the credit. He wants to be a big shot in the eyes of the teachers and principal.
>
> Some seniors are bad. [In what way?] They won't chip in on the work. They leave it all for the juniors to do.
>
> The seniors get more money depending on the size of the building and we just get the same no matter where we are. We do all the work, so why shouldn't we get what they get?

While the juniors think of the shortcomings of their relationships with seniors in terms of social support, salary differential, and work recognition, the seniors are mainly concerned with "getting the job done." Seniors are irritated by anything or anybody who interferes with getting the job done--and those obstacles are likely to be juniors, as the following seniors illustrate:

> The trouble with these juniors is that they are only thinking of today--they forget the past. They begrudge us for making more money than them. But they forget that some of us have worked for forty years to get where we are today.
>
> Some juniors don't want to study. They want to move up but they don't want to learn anything to do it. If they learn something they figure we might ask them to do something extra to help get the job done. Some of these men are scared of any mechanical device that runs. [What do you mean by that?] Oh you know, they are afraid of anything mechanical, anything that has parts that move, like big fans and oil burners. They don't want to go near these things, and it is hard for us to teach them about them.
>
> You want to avoid certain high schools. Some have five or six juniors and there is dissension. [Like what?] Some want to get away from the school, or

> some may be goldbricking or have a drinking problem. [So what if they drink a little?] Then they can't work right.
>
> Some juniors are lazy. If you lean on them a little or push them they will bid off.

Seniors try to prevent "good" juniors, (those who "get the job done") from bidding off their schools. Sometimes the senior will try to keep the man by sharing his own overtime with him. But if the senior is "too" nice and raises the junior's aspirations, he may lose him anyway:

> If you get a good junior and favor him too much you can lose him. If he passes the test [for senior] he becomes a P.I. [permanent intermittant senior], and as soon as he becomes a P.I., he has to leave you. [Why?] Right now the seniors [senior positions] are frozen, so he would probably be transferred to one of the night crews and wait six or seven years till there is an opening for a senior.

Seniors also avoid schools with inexperienced or understaffed crews. The schools in the inner city suffer from both of these problems. In addition, excessive vandalism at these schools also causes men to bid off, and they are either replaced by inexperienced men or not replaced at all. Such crews require more supervision and help from the senior than full and experienced crews. Therefore, they are avoided. Three seniors describe this avoidance and their motives:

> I stay away from schools with inexperienced crews. A good school is a school that has steady help with men that aren't taken away. I had only five weeks with a full crew and this means that the senior has to do all

> the ext a work to cover up without compensation. If a school is in a good location, you can keep your help because the men won't bid off.
>
> Many big buildings are understaffed and you can't get enough help. Especially in Roxbury [a predominantly Negro neighborhood] because people bid out of these schools. If a man isn't replaced this means more work for everyone and this is bad for morale.
>
> Our biggest problem is lack of help when people are out sick. Some men use any excuse to stay out, and if two men are out, there may be only the senior left to do all the work.

There is, therefore, a great deal of movement between schools by custodians. Seniors try to "get away from" inexperienced and undermanned work crews; juniors leave seniors who expect them to work harder than they are accustomed to work; and both seniors and juniors avoid the two infamous supervisors. Both juniors and seniors bid off schools that are racially explosive and are characterized by excessive vandalism. They also flee teachers and principals who make too many demands on them and with whom they cannot get along. These issues will be explored more fully in the following chapters.

Chapter 8: "We Get No Respect"

Rodney Dangerfield, a popular comedian, centers his act on the premise that "He gets no respect." This same complaint is heard often from the Bay City custodians. They believe that their important contributions merit recognition by the citizens of the community as well as by public officials. After all, explains one custodian:

> We are the policemen in the schools--we keep outsiders out and protect the children. We are firemen. We are doctors. We are gardeners. We are plumbers. We are guidance counselors. We do everything and anything in the schools, and we don't get any respect, from the kids, teachers, parents, or anyone. This makes me very unhappy because most of the seniors are fine men. You couldn't find any better men in Bay City.

Another states:

> The non-academic group is a nasty word. They think that they don't need us, that we are a bunch of ignorant bums. This is an insult. We should change our title to superintendent of maintenance and care. Then maybe we would get more respect around here.

Perhaps one cause of this is the "bad press" the custodians have received over the years in the Bay City newspapers. Most custodians believe that the local press not only singles them out for special criticism, but also generally "picks on" all city employees:

> They [the newspapers] pick on all city employees. You have to go back to the days of Mayor C to find a time

> when they respected labor. Ever since then you have the Chamber of Commerce saying that the city spends too much in salaries for their workers.

Most of the custodians believe that the Bay City newspaper reporters make a special effort to give them a bad image:

> The papers make the job look like a patronage plum. Once when the school committee said they were going to hire more custodians, the Citizens League for Better Schools came out against it, because the papers made it look like a giveaway.

> The newspapers make the job really look like something. They tell lies about us and about how much money we make. They make the job sound like something even a superintendent of schools would envy. They do this to sell papers.

In fact, school custodians occasionally "make" the New York Times, twice in the 1960's, for example, because of their impressive level of compensation. Time Magazine in 1963 reported an amazing story about the earnings of head custodians in New York City. Under a contract plan, the chief custodian at Bushwick High School earned $53,000 in one year, $13,000 more than was paid to the New York City Superintendent of Schools!

Most of the custodians' criticism centers around the Bay City newspapers' implication that custodians are "tremendously" overpaid for "unskilled" workers who lack advanced degrees:

> Six years ago there was an article with the title "You don't need a degree to earn twelve to fourteen thousand dollars a year." They wrote about one custodian who had a lot of overtime and who was in the highest paying

> school. They made people think that all custodians were making this amount of money. The man was really making about ten thousand dollars, with a salary of sixty-seven hundred plus about three thousand in overtime. He was the highest paid custodian in the system, and they said we were all making that much! We asked them to print a retraction but they didn't.
>
> The newspapers tell a bunch of lies about us. Once they said that it costs the people of Bay City forty-thousand dollars a year to put the flag up [in front of each school]. They said the custodians come in on weekends to do this and get paid overtime to do it and this comes to forty-thousand a year. They said we were unpatriotic and should do this for nothing. Billy C, the chairman of the school board at that time, stuck up for us. He said that we had to come in on weekends to keep the boiler going and so we had to get overtime for this. This was when we put the flag up--we weren't getting paid to come in just to put the flag up.
>
> Sure, the papers say that we are making more money than teachers. But they don't say that we work fifty hours a week and on Saturdays and Sundays to get this money. They don't say that we work fifty weeks a year and that teachers get the summer off. They don't say that we come in early when it's cold to get the heat going and then are sent home if the school board decides to call school off. Why don't they say these things?

A few excerpts from the Bay City newspaper feature editorial sections illustrate the special attention given custodians. Although we cannot validate the claim that custodians earn "too much" money, we can determine whether custodians earn as much as the news media claims. We turn to each of these issues in turn.

Excerpts from Article in the Bay City Globe, 1967

Title: "Janitor's Pay Questioned"

Mayor C ordered a special five-man committee Wednesday to conduct public hearings into the salaries paid school janitors and other non-educational personnel.

The Bay City School Board asked last week to approve a $59.2 million budget--an increase of $8.7 million over last year.

Included in that budget are $10 weekly increases to 500 janitors, giving senior custodians $194 a week salary or more than is earned by many suburban teachers. C also said custodians average $900 annually per man for overtime.

C stressed that the committee would concern itself with non-educational items and would not touch upon the recent pay raise granted to Bay City's teachers.

Excerpts from Article in the Bay City Globe, 1959

Title, in headline form: "Hub Custodians Pay Highest in State"

Senior school custodians do better in Bay City than anywhere in Bay State, making up to $7100 annually. This is roughly $1000 above such communities as Newton, Brookline, Wellesley, Framingham, Winchester and Lexington.

On teacher pay, the situation is reverse.

Bay City, once the educational Mecca of Bay State with the best paid school system, boasts the best senior custodians' pay schedule, but no longer the lead in teachers' pay it once held.

Despite the pay bulge which Bay City's senior school custodians have over those in surrounding cities and towns, the school board does not feel that they are overpaid.

Excerpts from Editorial, Bay City Globe, 1967

Title: "The School Budget"

With so much extra money needed for higher teacher salaries, it is hard to see why the limited school

resources should be dissipated on non-academic raises at this time.

Excerpts from Bay City Traveler, 1962

Title: "School Janitors Lead Pay Raise Fight"

> Set in motion when the five-member Bay City School Board last week authorized a $42 million 1963 budget, the fight for non-academic pay raises promises to be a real donnybrook. . . . Leading the pack to cut up the extra $5 million are the school janitors, who are now just about the highest paid broom pushers in the nation. . . .
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> While the Mayor is not going out of his way to fight with any faction of city workers, he in fact has the advantage rather than the school board because a lot more voters will agree with him that the school janitors happiness is not worth a $3.30 increase in the tax rate.

Excerpts from Editorial, Bay City Globe, 1959

> The figures on the relative salaries of teachers and school custodians make strange reading. In Bay City a teacher, even if he has a doctor's degree, can only earn $6600, while a senior custodian receives $7151. It is explained that teachers work only nine months of the year and custodians all twelve.
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> That explanation will satisfy some; it would be more convincing if the custodian system provided a round-the-clock watch which made successful vandalism impossible.

Two readers, however, approved of high custodial salaries:

Letter to the Editor, Bay City Globe, 1959

> To the Editor--After reading your article in the April 12 Globe relative to pay increases for the supervisors of attendance [truant officers] and

> custodians, we, as two charming old maids, feel that no custodian or attendance officer in Bay City should be allowed to remain single.

Let us first deal with the question of salary. The newspaper articles lead one to believe that all custodians earn almost $200 per week. A careful reading, however, indicates that only the seniors earn this much. In addition, less than one-half of the Bay City custodians are seniors. But more important, they overlook the fact that only a few seniors earn the "top" salary. A senior in the highest pay grade, grade 27, with more than seven years on the job, earns a weekly salary of $199. However, how many seniors are in the top grades? Only about six or seven. For a better understanding of custodial salaries, let us examine how they are computed.

For custodians, as for other types of employees, salary increases with seniority. Salary is also determined, however, by the size and the kind of school in which one works, i. e., by the "amount" of work. The lower grades and smaller schools pay less than the big high schools. Seniority not only influences pay directly, it also allows men to bid for the higher paying schools.

About 75 percent of the schools are in the lowest paying categories, categories 17, 18, and 19. A senior with twelve years as a custodian would make $7500 a year in grade 17 and $8400 a year in grade 19. This is not a salary range extending from twelve to fourteen thousand dollars per year as the newspapers imply. For a

senior to earn the highest pay of $199 per week on the highest step, step 27, is rare indeed. It takes more than 25 years to work up to a high school and to accumulate the seniority which puts a man in this category. There are less than ten men in this position. The newspapers indicate that most men are at this level.

The newspapers also emphasize the large compensation for overtime. Again the figures here cannot be correct judging by the take-home pay of the men. There are, of course, many opportunities for overtime. In cold weather the coal fires that heat more than half of the buildings must be kept burning over the weekends. This means four hours overtime on Saturday and four hours on Sunday for about twelve of the coldest weeks of the winter. A basketball game at night in one of the schools gives the custodian about four hours overtime. A building with portable classrooms gives the custodian twenty minutes overtime for each classroom he cleans. And of course, other night-time activities such as the Parents and Teachers Association (P. T. A.) and boy scout meetings mean that the school must be kept open and extra cleaning activities must be performed, with resultant overtime for the custodians.

But there are limits to the amount of overtime a man can earn, and these limits are overlooked by the news media. In the first place, men share overtime. That is, if there are nighttime activities or weekend work in a particular school, the members of the custodial crew will alternate overtime assignments. Secondly,

the amount of overtime depends on the kind of school; elementary schools offer fewer opportunities to earn overtime than high schools. Many of the senior men in the high schools, who are generally older and have grown up children prefer to give the overtime to the younger men, who are stronger and have more need for the money. The men who earn the most money in overtime are therefore, the men with the lower salaries. The salaries of from 12 to 14 thousand dollars a year that the newspaper articles mention are very rare, indeed. A man would have to be a senior in the highest paying school, earning $10,000 a year and receive an additional $2000 in overtime. I spoke with the highest paid custodian in the system, a man with seniority in the highest paying school in the system. This man, in his best year earned fifteen hundred dollars in overtime. This was under extremely unusual conditions where several members of the night crew were out sick for a long period of time. He believes that the newspaper reporters were writing about the supervisors who do earn fourteen thousand dollars a year, but as he points out, "they are administrators and not custodians."

Before we conclude that the newspapers are exaggerating the salary of custodians as a group, we should consider one further possibility. That is, that the identity of the high overtime schools is a guarded secret, and therefore many custodians are unaware of their more fortunate colleagues' overtime opportunities. Interviews indicated that this is not true. The high overtime schools were

generally known to the custodians. In addition, a custodian often visits a school before he bids for it and can get a fairly clear idea of the overtime available.

We conclude, therefore, that while the top senior salary is about $199 per week as the newspapers suggest, this is earned by less than ten men. In addition, overtime does not raise the highest salaries appreciably because the highest paid custodians avoid overtime. But even if they wanted overtime, there is simply not enough available to bring even the highest salary to the $12,000 range. The newspapers are giving a distorted picture of custodial salaries--and indeed, a distorted picture of the custodians themselves. The references to "broom pushers," "janitors," and non-degree holders indicate the strong negative feelings which the Bay City newspapers have reserved for the school custodians.

Besides getting "no respect," another common complaint of custodians which is shared by the chief schoolhouse custodian is that architects rarely consult them when planning new buildings. Even plans for renovation of old schools seldom come to the attention of the chief schoolhouse custodian "until everything is decided and planned." This probably results from architects' low regard for the opinions of anyone with the label "custodian" (even the chief custodian).

There are, however, some valid reasons for architects to consult custodians. For example, according to the chief:

> We have problems with architects who are only interested in the outside of a building. They don't care about keeping down expenses when they put up a building, because they figure the taxpayers are paying for it anyway. These buildings are designed for looks, not usefulness. The architects feel they are too good to talk to custodians. If the buildings were designed differently, we could save money--because they could be designed so that less men could service it. The architects should talk to each and every employee in the school.

Several custodians mentioned specific improvements that they have in the past recommended or would recommend to builders and planners:

> In our school there isn't a bell system to call the custodian.

> We could give them [architects] good advice. They put the incinerators down at the end of the hall. We could save a lot of time if they were at the end closer to our office.

One senior accidentally encountered an architect who was planning an addition to his school. The custodian told the architect about two streams flowing underneath the site, thus saving the city quite a bit of money, by preventing the laying of a foundation on unsuitable ground.

The majority of the custodians mention only two other serious problems: one concerning the work and the other, the children. The first problem is that of snow removal. Since there is no organized program for snow removal in the Bay City schools, each school must develop its own procedure. Again, the custodians "get no respect." The school board does not think enough of custodians to give them a

snow removal program and modern equipment with which to work. The custodians refer to the superiority of equipment used by custodians in the suburbs:

> They have fancy snow plows. They don't shovel there. And they have fancy lawnmowers which they can sit on and ride around. Why in some suburbs, the custodians don't even have to take care of the lawns, the parks departments do this.

Another very serious problem that almost every custodian mentioned was the fact that they must continually "protect" themselves from certain kinds of accusations by teachers and parents. Custodians who are "nice" to the children are vulnerable to suspicion of having "ulterior motives." Custodians fear being suspected of homosexuality. Below, a custodian indicates that he is aware of this problem and tells hos he "protects" himself:

> One time a teacher brought me this boy whose fly had broken. I got my pliers and fixed it. But I made sure she [the teacher] stayed. I wouldn't fix it if she wasn't there. You've got to protect yourself or some people will think you're not right. [What?] You know, they think you have something for boys.

But the custodians are also morally "suspect" when they are around girls. This is one reason why some custodians avoid girls' schools:

> You have to be careful. [Why?] There are all kinds of embarrassing situations. Suppose you go into the gym or locker room. Or suppose there is a flood in the bathroom. You've got to protect yourself. [How?] You make sure that you are covered. You tell the

> principal or the gym teacher that you will be in a certain place at a certain time. So if anything happens, you are covered.

Surely custodians whose morals are questioned by teachers and parents "get no respect." They must, therefore, protect themselves accordingly.

We conclude that the evidence indicates that custodians "get no respect." People seem to hold the custodian in low esteem, if actions are any indication of feelings: newspapers which claim that the custodians are overpaid use inflated figures as proof; architects do not solicit custodians' opinions about matters affecting them and their work; the school board does not think custodial work important enough for modern equipment; and custodians are morally "suspect" by teachers and parents.

Chapter 9: Custodians, Students, Socialization, and Vandalism

The fact that custodians must meet certain "moral" requirements or standards for their job reflects acceptance of the idea that custodians influence students. A socialization model is appropriate and leads us to ask: "How and what do students learn from custodians?"

In elementary schools, the custodian, who is one of the few adult males in the building, serves as a role model for the young boys. One custodian describes how some teachers ask students to emulate him:

> In an elementary school, everything is Miss this or Miss that. But you are Mr. Jones. You are a big deal. The little kids look up to you and imitate you. A little boy asks you to tie his shoe, and he looks up to you and says thank you like it's a big deal. The teacher points to me and says to the kids things like "Now don't you want to grow up and be like Mr. Jones? He drinks his milk, so you should too."

Since even in emergency situations elementary teachers cannot leave their classrooms, the custodian is often called to assist if there are "problems." For example, when a child breaks the zipper on his pants, the custodian is often called in to fix it with his pliers. Again, when a child gets sick or "messes himself," the custodian helps clean him. He is sometimes asked to take a child to the nurse's room, and if the nurse is not there, he will wash a

bruise or quiet an excited child.

In situations such as these, it is easy for custodians to befriend children and teach them how to act like adults. They tell a child the difference between right and wrong, good and bad behavior. They even punish students who misbehave: "Sure, I give them a good kick in the ass when they get out of line once in a while." The custodian can make a child feel like a man by treating him like one. For example, some custodians give children "little jobs" to do. This is not a means for the custodian to avoid work, because this kind of help usually makes more work for the custodian than was necessary before the child's help. One custodian asked a student for help in order to coerce the child to accept gifts of food:

> See, this kid was hungry. I could tell when he came in in the morning. I used to bring him a cup of hot chocolate and some oatmeal in the morning. But he felt that he didn't deserve the food, like it was charity. So I pretended that he was working for it. I gave him a little job and he helped me empty the garbage. I also told him that he was the boss of the other kids and should keep them from breaking the windows. So I treated him like a man and appealed to his pride. He felt that the food wasn't charity, but was for his work. You know, that was the only way I could get him to take the food. He made more work for me because he always spilled the garbage, but I had to let him help and you could see his pride.

I have come across many instances of custodians buying such things as shoes, food, and school supplies for poor students. Often the custodian is the only one a problem child will "listen to."

> Some of these poor kids are bringing themselves up. They have no parents and no one to look after them except an older brother or sister. They will listen to the custodian and no one else. Once you achieve contact with a kid, once you get him to listen, he can be helped. The custodian is sometimes the only one who can hold the kid's attention, and he will listen to the custodian and not to others.

Custodians talk to children in order to "straighten them out." They chastize them for "bad" behavior and instruct them in the correct way to act. Custodians, especially in the high schools, also serve as vocational counselors. Below are two examples:

> Sometimes you help a kid get a job. There was this big amazon in our school who was a trouble maker. I got him to straighten out by finding him part-time jobs. [How?] Well, I know the guys who drive the trucks for the contractors and suppliers and I asked around. I found a couple of part-time jobs for the kid and he had spending money and stayed out of trouble. I heard about an opening in an apprenticeship program and told him about it. He didn't even know what an apprentice was, but after he graduated, he went into the union as an apprentice.
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> Once I chased down a scholarship for a student. We had a slum kid who was in the honor society. I know a guidance counselor at a school where I used to work and I told him about this kid. I got them together--and it wasn't for me they would have never met--and the kid got a four-year scholarship to Harvard.

In some high schools the custodians are entrusted by the students to "keep the peace." In these racially mixed schools there is a chronic potential for violence. The custodian sometimes serves as a middle man for the white and Negro students, and maintains the

"peace" in the following way:

> I keep the school a neutral territory and both groups [whites and Negroes] know that there is no fooling around here. [How do you keep it neutral?] I don't get involved in picking sides and I apply all my rules equally. When I am with the whites I don't talk against the niggers, and when I'm with the niggers I don't talk against the whites. I talk to both groups and bring them together. The kids realize this and they know I'm fair. So they don't cause any trouble in the school.

This area is certainly an interesting one for further research. How do custodians socialize students? Do custodians socialize new teachers? ["When a new teacher comes in I give him the word about the principal and certain teachers to watch out for."] What areas of behavior are involved and does the custodian serve as an example for desired or undesired behaviors? Does the custodian tell the child or teacher what to do or what not to do? Answers to these questions would not only provide more information about what goes on in schools but would contribute to the development of socialization theory.

Custodians bid off schools that are subject to excessive vandalism, either by the students or by outsiders. One custodian called this their most serious problem:

> The worst thing we are up against is vandalism. It's hard to fight this. We can fight anything else, but this is definitely the worst part of our job.

It is a problem keeping custodians in ghetto schools which are

plagued by vandalism. It takes about three years to bid off these schools. Vandalism is anathema to the custodian for three reasons. First, it results in more work; if windows are broken, it is the custodian who must sweep up the glass. Break-ins often mean phone calls from the police in the middle of the night. Secondly, attacks are sometimes directed against the custodian's car or other personal property. Thirdly, sometimes the custodian himself is attacked.

The "worst" schools, as measured by a high incidence of vandalism, are in the predominantly Negro neighborhoods of the city; however, schools in the white, middle-class areas are not immune:

> Roxbury [a predominantly Negro area] is the worst area to work in. But even in my school [white middle-class] there are lots of broken windows, and we had three fires last night.

Vandalism also depends to some extent on the level of the school. There is little vandalism in elementary schools, more in junior high schools and still more directed against the high schools.

Children who attend a particular school are often "rough" on the school custodian. "If they don't like you they will break your [school] windows or take the air out of your tires." The damage caused by "insiders," however, is usually minor, and can be corrected by what the custodians refer to as "proper discipline" by the teachers. They believe that much of the destruction and "mess" caused by children in and around the school could be prevented by

more effective teacher supervision. Poor discipline leads to "repetition of jobs":

> The teachers are supposed to watch the kids. We clean up and they mess up again. So we have to clean up all over again. At one time I could have gone to Bay City Tech for $14 more a week, but I wouldn't get any peace of mind there. There is no discipline there. The students are rough and the school is in a bad area.

Custodians complain that the teachers who are supposed to supervise the lavatories often are not at their posts. As a result, many acts of vandalism are committed there. Doors are often pulled off commode stalls; handles taken from the commode are used to stop up the sinks and cause floods.

The custodian must be a human relations expert to "handle kids" and "get them on his good side" so they won't try to "make his life difficult" by destroying the school or his personal property. A custodian relates his experiences below:

> It is important to stay in with the kids because they can screw you. They can break your [school] windows so you have to pick up glass. [How do you stay in with the kids?] By not associating with them or getting friendly with them. In the old days you could get friendly with a kid and if he gave you a hard time you could kick him in the ass and in two weeks he could be back to help you. Now if you did this they would set your building on fire. Some of these kids will turn on you in a minute. One minute they are friendly and the next minute they turn on you. If you treat the kids good they will respect you. When I was in the North End I had tough kids and I always got along well with them. [How?] Well, you don't act wise. You can't order them off the grounds even

> if it hurts. If you see a kid tear up a lot of paper and drop it in the hallways, you don't order him to pick it up, you just turn your head and pretend not to see it. [Does he know you have seen him and you are pretending to ignore him?] He knows you saw him. If the kids are against you they can make your life miserable. They can flatten the tires on your car. Or when it snows, they throw snow balls at you.

Most of the custodians believe that "outsiders," children and adults who do not attend a particular school, are responsible for the majority of vandalism and acts of violence directed against people in their schools:

> The kids in my school are usually O. K. It's the outsiders who are rough.
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> The night shift is rough. If one man is sick the other man won't work alone. Outsiders try to get in and cause trouble. This trouble is caused by outsiders. This is a specialized [vocational] high school and the kids have to take an entrance exam. So the kids want to be here and don't cause too much damage.

Outsiders are kept out of the school not only during the evening but also during the hours when school is in session. Every school I visited was a veritable fortress with all its doors locked. In order for a visitor to enter a building, he must ring a bell and wait for someone from the school's administrative office to admit him. In one school I caused a bit of a furor because I was discovered in the hallway by the assistant principal after I entered the building without his knowledge; someone had left a side door open. The security,

therefore, is not as tight as it could be. Students in many schools may be seen entering and leaving buildings through broken windows and doors with faulty locks. Custodians sometimes spend their own money if necessary for security purposes:

> I can't get a chain for the front door and I need some more locks. I spent my own money to buy a bar to put across the front door. I'll get re-imbursed in one way or another, don't worry about that. I'll just overstate some other items in my budget. It's easier to put up chains myself than to make trouble by asking downtown for them.

One custodian describes how children from other schools come to his building to start trouble:

> Kids from the [Martin Luther] King school down the road come up here [to the Burke school]. They start breaking windows and they want to bother the girls. They start yelling in the windows and then usually some kid opens one of the doors from the inside and lets them in.

Below are listed some of the things that vandals do in the schools which are particularly obnoxious to the custodians:

1) Destruction outside of the building such as broken windows, bottles in the yard, feces put on door handles, etc.

2) Break-ins for thievery. Office machines and other equipment have been stolen. One of the more daring raids occurred recently when intruders walked out of one technical high school with a machine weighing two thousand pounds.

3) Break-ins for recreational purposes. Often youngsters who do not attend a school will break into

the gymnasium at night to play basketball. Here again, the custodian must be a public relations man in order to remove the children without "causing trouble." As one explains, "You have to sweet-talk them into leaving. You say something like 'I'll get fired if you don't leave.' Then when I'm driving home at night I see them enter again. There's not much you can do."

4) Break-ins for destruction. This includes setting fires, tearing up books, and the like.

5) Break-ins to attack people.

This last item deserves special attention. Many custodians have become the victims of personal attacks in recent years, and this has undoubtedly caused some of them to quit their jobs. One custodian who had recently spent several hundred dollars for new bridge work was punched in the mouth and his new dental work was ruined. In the last few months there has also been a shooting. Last year's president of the custodian's association asked that custodians be armed or at least given more protection. There is, of course, cooperation from the police but this is not sufficient. The seriousness of this situation is indicated by the fact that bureaucratic procedures have been established for reporting assaults on custodians. Some of the violence results from civil disturbances or race riots. The new contract between the school board and the custodians has a civil disturbance clause, and custodians are now permitted to leave the building if they are in imminent physical danger.

It is difficult for custodians to protect themselves, both physically and legally. One custodian was observed putting up no

trespassing signs in his school yard, which announced that the yard was closed during the evening. This sign was actually for the benefit of the police, not potential trespassers. With the sign in place, the police could then legally move against people for trespassing.

One irate member of the community entered a school to attack its staff for "putting germs into the children" when they were innoculated against polio. He attacked a custodian who finally managed to pin the intruder to the ground. It took the custodian's co-workers 45 minutes to locate a police officer. The policeman came and asked the custodian if he wanted to press charges. The custodian, not wanting to cause further trouble, asked the policeman to release the culprit. Two days later, the attacker filed assault charges against the custodian for pinning him to the ground!

These incidents illustrate that it is difficult for the custodian to give himself legal protection. It is also difficult for the custodian to protect himself from physical violence. His adversaries are often clever and well trained. A custodian recently found some militants instructing children in the manufacture of Molotov cocktails in the school yard. Training also is revealed in the skill shown in certain acts of vandalism. For example, some intruders recently flooded the basement of a school. The vandals opened the hot water rather than the cold water pipe although the two pipes were side by side, unlabeled and identical. The scalding water on the basement floor prevented anyone from getting near enough

to fix it. If they had flooded the basement with cold water, it would have been an easy matter to fix the pipe. Other attackers and vandals display surprising knowledge of the schools they enter. They climb through ventilating systems as though they had maps, use master keys to open locks, and so on. It is very difficult for the custodian to protect himself under these circumstances.

Chapter 10: The Custodians Versus the Academic Side of the School House

Teachers and administrators (primarily principals) comprise the academic side of the schoolhouse. The quality of the interpersonal relations between custodians and representatives of the academic house affects the horizontal mobility of the custodians. If the academic side of the house is "bad," custodians will bid off or avoid the school. If the academic side of the house is "good," the custodians will bid for the school. The question to be answered in this section is, then, "What makes some teachers and principals 'better' than others from the perspective of the custodian?" The answer, as pointed out above, depends upon the interpersonal relationships between the two sides of the school house: academic and non-academic. We begin with a discussion of principal-custodian relations and then focus on teacher-custodian relations.

The custodians emphasize the importance of "getting alone" with the principal:

> The principal is not our supervisor, but it is important to get along with him. He can pester you to death otherwise.
>
> The principal is important. He makes the job if you and he work together. [How can you get on his good side?] For example, if a door is broken and you requisition a new door or lock it may take a long time to get a new one. So you fix it yourself and the principal appreciates this.

Custodians speak more often of principals who are "no good," than of ones who are "good." They claim to know through "the grapevine" who the bad ones are and thus whom to avoid. Sometimes, however, this information proves to be incorrect. This is because "goodness" or "badness" is not always an attribute of the principal himself, but is often a function of the congruence of the personalities of the custodian and the principal. One custodian offers an example:

> Once I bid a school because it paid more money. The custodians told me that I would be sorry because the principal was a woman and she was tough when it came to cleaning and was hard to get along with. Well, I got the bid and stayed with her for eight years. She treated me excellently and we got along well. So it depends on the individual to a great extent.

Sometimes the custodian will "put up" with a problem principal, "humor him along," and not leave the school.

> Some principals are just no good. We have one here who is crazy about keeping the yard clean. He has me and my men out there sweeping it twenty times a day, but we do this and it keeps him happy, so we have no other problems with him.

However, sometimes more serious problems arise between a custodian and a principal, problems with which a custodian cannot "put up." For example, a principal may ask the custodian to do something that is technically illegal. The custodian who wants to protect his job will refuse and inform his supervisor. This adds considerable

friction to the relationship. One incident is cited below:

> One principal asked me to put some chairs up in the hallway so he could set up a class there. I said I wouldn't do it, because I know the building laws and this illegal. The principal got real mad, and said that no janitor could tell him what to do. He had the chairs put there anyway, but I was covered. I went to the supervisor and told him what happened. I got the hell away from that school as fast as I could.

In most of these serious conflicts with the principal, the custodian bids off a school. He could complain to his supervisors or to the head schoolhouse custodian, but this is rarely done. As one custodian said:

> You just can't accuse a principal of something. Suppose the guy's a nut case. It's very hard to prove this. It doesn't pay for a custodian to fight with a principal. You just say to hell with it and move out.

A principal is a "nut" or "bad" if he does not know how to handle people. In the case below, a principal lowered the morale of a school to the point where he could not hold teachers or custodians:

> The main area of conflict is fairness in discipline. We had this principal who encouraged cliques and he got the different groups in the buildings at swords point. It got so bad that the second floor teachers didn't talk to the first floor teachers, and he encouraged this by not being impartial. [What do you mean?] Well, when he made rules, they didn't apply to everyone. He said that some people can do one thing and that some others couldn't. Before something like this gets to involve the custodians it usually has ripped through the academic side of the house.

Many of the problems between teachers and custodians are also interpersonal in nature; that is, they are the kind of conflicts that could be resolved by a human relations expert. Teachers in some schools are "better" than teachers in other schools. There are four main areas of friction between teachers and custodians: (1) The teachers' low evaluation of the custodian as a person; (2) the different role definitions of the custodian held by the teacher and the custodian; (3) the function of the custodian as a "middle man" who remains neutral in disputes between different cliques of teachers; and, (4) the teachers' belief that custodians make too much money for people in their "station in life."

Custodians react to teacher hostility in four ways: (1) They leave the school by bidding off if the teachers there are particularly "bad"; (2) They "train" the teachers not to pester them; (3) They hide and make themselves inconspicuous--teachers then cannot find the custodian and cannot annoy him; and (4) Custodians respond to teacher hostility by simply ignoring teacher requests.

Before we begin detailed consideration of teacher-custodian relations, we should emphasize that the relations between teachers and custodians in the Bay City Public Schools are not characterized by as much stress as the analysis below may indicate. In three schools, I observed teachers and custodians playing poker, smoking, and "shooting the breeze" in the basement. Relations were cordial, and they all seemed to be having "a good time." Furthermore,

custodians often do favors for teachers. I noticed a custodian bringing coffee and donuts for teachers from a luncheonette near the school. Especially in elementary schools where teachers do not have free periods, the custodian is important; he makes coffee for the teachers who cannot leave their rooms. Teachers appreciate the custodian's help and reciprocate by not "pestering" him.

Many teachers, however, bear a certain degree of hostility toward custodians. Some of this may be traced to the past when the school budget was allocated according to the "surplus" principle. Years ago, teachers' salaries were allocated on a priority basis in the school budget. Whatever money was left over was then allocated to the non-academic side of the house. The teachers and custodians competed with each other for the available money. As one custodian pointed out:

> Some teachers felt that any money we were taking, we were taking from them. But now we have collective bargaining, and each group asks for what it wants and it doesn't consider the other group.

Many custodians believe that teachers are envious of their salaries. Again, some of this envy may have its origin in the past when the custodians worked on the contract system and were better paid than teachers. Under a contract system, a custodian is paid a large sum of money, which he spends to buy cleaning supplies, coal, and to pay the salaries of helpers. Money "left over" or not

allocated by the custodian was kept as compensation. Teachers, according to custodians, forget that the contract system ended twenty years ago. In addition, some of the financial envy of teachers is contemporary in origin. The issue is not whether the custodians earn "too much" or "too little" money, but that they receive a salary which is comparable to that of people with degrees, i. e., to that of teachers. One custodian analyzed the problem this way:

> It really bugs the teachers. They can't see us getting pay increases because they are jealous. They think that just because they had to get a degree and we didn't, we should get a lot less money than them. Many of us had to study to get engineer's licenses, but they don't figure this as a degree. And they are always comparing themselves to us when they want a raise. But then they say they are better than us because we are labor. If they really are better than us, how come they compare themselves to us?

According to most of the custodians interviewed, teachers believe that they are "better" than custodians. Teachers indicate their derisiveness toward them by calling them "janitors," a term which irritates the custodians. But custodians also sense the job-related insecurity of many of these teachers who had their origins in the lower middle class as the following quotation demonstrates:

> Some teachers feel that the custodian is low. They treat us like dirt and call us janitors. They holler about their room being dirty and say it is our fault when it is their own fault. Just because teachers went to college for four years they figure they

> deserve something better than teaching. And so they take it out on us. Just like we are trying to get away from the label 'janitor,' they are trying to get away from 'teacher.' Some of them are now calling themselves, 'assistants to the headmaster.'

The custodian may also become involved in disputes between cliques of teachers, and, he is likely to get caught in the middle. Since he tries to remain neutral, his offices often become the battle ground for these cliques. If he tries to mediate the dispute, both sides blame him for interfering. In the words of one custodian, "we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. The best thing we can do is mind our own business in these situations."

Some teachers believe that certain kinds of repairs should be made by custodians when in fact they must be performed by outside contractors or The School and Buildings Department. They often "pester" custodians about delayed repairs, when the custodian actually has no control over scheduling:

> Some teachers expect too much to be done. They want the custodian to do the work that should be done by outside contractors. You have to wait for the contractor to come, and then they blame you because it's taking too long. If the toilets are backed up you have to wait for the plumber to come and fix them.

Teachers sometimes make unreasonable demands on the custodian. For example, teachers who sit near the window or on the window ledge during the winter insist that the custodian maintain a classroom temperature of eighty degrees near the window. Not only is this impos-

sible but it is also not legal, since the building code dictates room temperature. In order to avoid "trouble," the custodian asks that demands like this one be put in writing. He can thus protect himself from the teacher who uses her only weapon against him, which is to complain to his supervisors about the quality of his work. The custodian, however, has more weapons at his disposal. He can, certainly, bid off a school if he is unable to get along with the teachers. But he also can inform on them to the principal and to his supervisors. Custodians have been known to inform their superiors about the political beliefs and "Un-American" classroom behaviors of teachers. In a later chapter we mention that a custodian informed his supervisors about the anti-war literature that appeared on a teacher's bulletin board. Corwin (1966, p. 338) establishes the universality of this behavior:

> Of course, in every organization there are a few people who are permitted to see all performances and to have access to most backstage areas. The janitor is in a position to observe teachers in their proper classroom roles as well as smoking in the furnace room. But in order to carry out this role, the janitor must be a nonentity, whose presence nobody is supposed to explicitly recognize, and one who is not to repeat anything he sees. Yet sometimes he is suspect. One teacher made this comment, "One of the janitors a number of years ago was hired to spy on the teachers on behalf of the board of education." So some of these janitors do enjoy a special place, greatly to the dismay of the teachers. Another teacher remarked that janitors are a "clearing house" for all information. "If you want to know anything, go to a janitor."

The custodian also "punishes" teachers by not cleaning their

rooms. This is part of the custodian's effort to retrain teachers. For example, the Bay City custodian is legally required to sweep "when necessary" and to clean up "normal" dirt. When teachers throw papers on the floor or permit children to do this, the custodian may inform the principal that this does not constitute necessary or "normal" dirt; consequently, the custodian will simply ignore it, letting the paper accumulate on the floor of the teacher's room:

> I leave it that way until she gets the idea to clean it up herself. Of course I will clean up normal dirt, but not papers that the kids tear up and throw on the floors. You have to train them not to leave their rooms messy.

The custodian can also make himself unaccessible to certain teachers.

> Some teachers think that if they see you walking around, you aren't doing anything and so they start complaining to you. We just stay out of sight and let them find us.

And lastly, a custodian may punish teachers by sabotaging teaching innovations. For example, if a teacher is trying to develop certain kinds of group cooperation, she may have the children move their chairs into small circles. The custodian, however, may insist that he cannot clean the room unless the chairs are kept in rows, thus preventing the teacher from carrying out her program. If the teacher and custodian are on good terms, incidents like this are not likely to occur.

We conclude that the custodian may bid off a school if the

teachers "pester" him, but he can also retrain teachers, ignore them, and interfere with some of their classroom techniques. There is little the teacher can do to an obnoxious custodian, so long as he "stays within the letter of the law."

Chapter 11: Custodians, Parents, and Community

One custodian pointed out that there is little interaction between him and the people of the neighborhood, whether parents or other residents. He drives up to the front of the building, enters the school, and then retraces his steps at night, never encountering adult members of the community.

On closer examination, however, his behavior demonstrates a concern and awareness with the social world surrounding his school. When asked about the beautiful and well-kept lawn in front of his school, he replied:

> I try to keep a good neat lawn because we are in a nice neighborhood. You know we are near hospitals and Oxbridge Medical School is right down the road.

In an inner-city neighborhood, the custodian must also be concerned about community residents. Many unemployed adults spend their time sitting or standing in front of their homes. From their vantage point, they watch the custodian as he takes care of the school lawn, removes snow or makes outside repairs. Often they make complaints about him. One custodian told of such harassment:

> Someone lived across the street from my school. She kept calling the school board and telling them that I had a kid running my school, you know, that I was paying a kid to do my work. She figured that if a kid could do my job, that her husband should have it.

Sometimes a custodian will have more cordial relations with the people in the neighborhood. One custodian caught a child jumping on the hood of a car that belonged to a neighborhood resident; he gave the child a "good swift kick in the ass" and prevented him from damaging the car further. The car owner thanked him and so did the boy's father.

Many custodians emphasize the importance of staying on friendly terms with--or at least remaining inconspicuous in--the community. Two custodians remarked:

> When I first came into the school department, they told me not to get involved with the parents and the people around the school. They said to let the principal handle these problems.
>
> A custodian is crazy to fight with the neighborhood because he can't win and it's usually easier for him to leave the school. If he minds his own business there are no problems.

Imagine, a custodian trying to transfer out of a school because of problems with the people in the neighborhood! One very articulate custodian described his dealings with people living around a school:

> If the people don't like the custodian they can give him a hard time. If you are in a Polish neighborhood and you don't speak Polish, you wouldn't last long at the school. The people would complain about you. There is always something that people can find to complain about. They can also make your life difficult. They smash your car, break into your school, and break windows. [Can you give an example?] There may be a neighborhood custom which you don't know about, and if you break it, there can be trouble. In one school I was in there was this understanding that you would leave

> the gates [to the yard] open, so that the little kids could get in and play. I locked the place up to keep the older kids from playing ball inside. I got hell. The older kids were climbing in anyway. The young ones were too small to climb in and so they were playing in the street where there was traffic. The parents complained and complained. I finally had to open the gates.

Some custodians act as the guardian of the community's values. I spoke with a teacher who had some anti-war literature on his bulletin board. One day the custodian entered the room with a well-dressed man [presumably one of the supervisors.] They looked at the board and then left. The next day the teacher was called down to the principal's office and asked to remove the material. Custodians, although they feel the desire to enforce community standards, sometimes refrain from action. One said that if he informed the principal that a teacher was a "radical," the principal would probably tell him to "go to hell." The custodian, because he is regarded as a non-person or a piece of furniture, is in a position to overhear a great deal of confidential information. They believe that many of the situations they hear about, however, do not have to be reported because they "take care of themselves":

> We get information from the kids and sometimes we use it. You know, kids are freer in our presence than when teachers are around. We hear about illegal things the kids do. One kid doesn't tell us everything. We overhear bits and pieces and then we put them all together. Sometimes we report to the principal "unofficially." Usually we don't want to get involved, we don't want to be squealers. We don't want to squeal

> on teachers either. If a teacher is a radical, the situation will take care of itself without us doing anything about it. [How.] Oh, the kids will go home and tell their parents and we let their parents take care of it.

The custodians meet the parents at the Parent Teachers Association meetings. While the custodians are not active participants in the PTA unless their own children are in the school, they do come into contact with the parents at the meetings. They usually help out at the meetings by preparing the coffee. The parents return the favor:

> They tell us about broken windows and fences and they show their appreciation [for the coffee] by not bothering us and complaining. We make their coffee but we don't have to do this. If they see someone fooling around the school they call us at our home and tell us about it. If they meet you on the street they may tell you their kid is getting smart and ask you to "take care of him." At the PTA meeting they see us as men and fathers, not just as custodians.

The custodians, to their dismay, are becoming involved in community racial problems. One community militant walked into the office of the chief custodian and asked him how he obtained the job. He said "A black man should have your job--why aren't there any black men in this office?" Mr. McC explained to him that he took the Civil Service examination to obtain the job and spent thirty years working his way up. The militant walked out of the office in "a huff." The school department has made an effort to recruit more

Negroes as custodians by lowering the passing grade for them on the Civil Service examination. However, Negroes simply do not want the job. The custodians have several theories as to this:

> Hell, they get more money on welfare. I have six kids and I could get more on welfare than I'm making now.
>
> They think the job is too low for them. The work may be dirty but the money is clean. I can't get a Negro kid to pick up a broom and help me sweep but a white kid will do it.

Because of the vandalism in the schools in Negro areas, some custodians favor the hiring of Negro custodians; they feel they would be effective in these schools. According to Mr. McC there were more Negro custodians twenty years ago than now. Of the four or five Negro custodians who work in the school department, only one works in a Negro neighborhood. They either bidded out of schools in Negro areas as soon as they could or they were promoted and so had to move to another school with an appropriate vacancy.

Chapter 12: The Association and The Union

Of the 480 Bay City public school custodians, 410 belong to the "Association." Approximately thirty to fifty of the custodians belong to Local 385 of the Building Service Employees International Union, which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO. As the legal bargaining unit, the Bay City Public School Buildings Custodian's Association negotiates the yearly contract for all of the custodians with the School Board. The Association also serves as the instrument through which the custodians influence the School Board, the Chief custodian, the four supervisory members of the Chief's staff, and other local bureaucrats and political appointees who are not directly concerned with the schools.

While more than one-third of the many other school custodian's Associations in the state are federated with each other through the statewide Bay State Public Schoolhouse Custodian's Association, the Bay City Custodian's Association is not a member of the statewide federation. Local 385 which represents only a few Bay City custodians, however, is a member of the statewide Association. It is curious that the majority of the Bay City custodians belong to an association which is isolated from similar associations in the state, while only a handful of custodians belong to Local 385 which is federated with other state groups. The following discussion deals with the factors which led to this situation.

When Gus G, a custodian and former officer of the Association, entered the school department in 1941, he joined an association of school custodians which had been organized more than 50 years before. Shortly thereafter, with promises of greater benefits, Local 900 of the State and County Municipal Employees International Union successfully organized the Bay City school custodians, recruiting most of the members from the original association which then went quietly out of existence. It was this union, Local 900, which formed the nucleus of both the association as it exists today, and Local 385 of the BSEIU.

There were intense "personality" conflicts among the leaders of Local 900 after its formation. Custodians today are unwilling to talk about these conflicts with outsiders. Many of the combatants are involved in the Bay City school system today, and some have risen to positions of power in international unions. But one senses the custodians' bitterness when they speak of these conflicts, and their vagueness on these matters seems intentional.

One emotionally laden issue dealt with the fight for the 40-hour work week. The State House of Representatives passed a bill initiated by Local 900 for a 40-hour work week which did not establish the maximum number of hours to be worked in a day. That is, under the provisions of the bill, a man could accumulate his 40 hours a week by working 20 hours a day for two days, or by working 10 hours a day for four days! Against the wishes of many

of the custodians, Billy W, one of the leaders of Local 900, asked the City Council to approve the bill as written. The custodians felt that Billy W and Local 900 "double-crossed us." As it turned out, the City Council defeated the bill because revised legislation was already pending in the State House proposing a 40-hour week with a maximum of eight to nine hours of work a day.

The seeds of dissension were sown. Mr. McC, the present Chief custodian, was one member of Local 900 who fought against the original inadequate 40-hour work week bill. He, Dave S (now an official in the BSEIU), and three-quarters of the members of Local 900 left, or "were kicked out" of the Local. They established Local 385 of the BSEIU.

The friction that characterized the relations of these two Locals began with the very inception of Local 385. One custodian bitterly recalls:

> Local 385 popped up overnight. They got their charter at a meeting held on a Holy Thursday night when everyone was in church or home. This was illegal. They tried to take over, but failed.

The fact that some of the organizers of Local 385 came in from the international headquarters of BSEIU and were outsiders also added to the developing friction. As one custodian stated:

> The union [Local 385] was set up by outsiders. Some of the officers of [Local] 900 felt left out. They felt that these outsiders didn't know the problems of the Bay

> City custodians as well as them and that they didn't know the local politicians, and so couldn't be of much help to us.

Tension also increased when the benefits that the organizers of Local 385 promised the men did not materialize. The School Boards avoided meeting the demands of Local 385 and Local 900 by "playing one group off against the other." In the words of one custodian:

> The unions were getting rich and they were not doing anything for the men. One union went to the School Board and asked for one thing, the other asked for something else. They were not able to agree on anything. The School Board said that they couldn't do anything so long as the men were split up in their demands. So we got nothing.

The men also came to distrust international unions because they felt exploited since two international unions were simultaneously collecting a per capita tax on the men "and they were not doing anything for us." This distrust lingers today, and is seen in such statements as:

> Occasionally some union organizer comes in from Chicago or New York and we just tell them to go to hell. They are just interested in our money.

World War II was ending, and some young men were returning home to seek jobs as school custodians. The inception of the 40-hour week meant that more men had to be hired, and this sudden rush of "young men" into the system brought the friction to a head. These younger men approached both unions with demands for increased benefits.

Frustrated, these men called a meeting one night at a local school. They proposed that many of their problems could be settled if they had one local group to speak for them. A vote was taken and the Bay City Public School Buildings Custodians' Association was formed. About 75 per cent of the men at the meeting left both Local 900 and Local 385 to join the Association. This left the dominant Association as we know it today with 410 custodians as members and the impotent union (Local 385) with its less than 50 members. The irony of the story is that while the young, "hot-blooded" junior custodians formed the Association, today, older, senior men dominate it.

Most of the custodians interviewed referred derisively to those few members of the union Local 385 as "diehards." They simply cannot comprehend why anyone would want to remain a member of the union. For example, one senior said: "The union can't do anything for us because we don't have the right to strike." The "diehards," however, make a pretty good case for membership in the union. To be sure, many remain because of the $500 death benefit insurance policy that union membership includes, and which they do not want to surrender. One diehard stated:

> Not having a strong union isolates us from the other custodians in the state. The Association is not a member of the Bay State Public Schoolhouse Custodians' Association, but the union is. We cannot go to state union meetings. So if we wanted legislation passed in the statehouse, this /the Association/ would be the

> group to go to. If the union could get better organized, they could do a lot through their relations with other organizations in the state. There is a per capita tax and custodians can't see why they should give money to the international union. But they don't understand that they are not giving completely to the international, because the international will help you if you are in trouble and they have thousands of members to back you up.

The union members also feel a strong identification with the labor movement as a whole. They are optimistic and believe that some day the members of the Association will join the union. The theme of unity comes up again and again in conversations with custodians. Several use the expression "all in one" reflecting their desire for the unity of labor with all custodians as members of a single organization which would work for the benefit of all. One custodian feels "an obligation to the men who made my job as good as it is who have since retired":

> The Association did pretty well by the job, but so did the union. The union had plans for the future to make things better. [For example?] The Association rushed too quickly to get sick leave. The Association settled for a rule letting us accumulate 50 days of sick leave. This was good, but everyone else [teachers, police, etc.] got 90 days after waiting a while. This was years ago. Now everyone has no limit on accumulation.

The custodians in the union feel solidarity with other members of organized labor, such as the secretaries and cafeteria workers in the school system who are also members of the Building Service

Employees International Union. They believe that solidarity with others in organized labor would give them more security:

> The union would give some protection through Federal laws that the Association doesn't give. For example, in the teacher's strike in New York under [Mayor] Wagner, the elementary, junior high and high school teachers all had different bargaining groups. Wagner said he would fire them. But if they had a union, he couldn't fire them. The union is based on a national experience. [But what can a union do?] Within the context of the Association you can't get an overall picture.

The majority of custodians seem a bit shortsighted. They do not remember the benefits the union brought them in the past. They do not see the relevance of legislation on the state level which membership in a statewide association can help pass. The problem may be, as one custodian put it, that:

> The job is too good today, so it is hard to get people to join the union. There are not many ways to make the job better. A union meeting was called by Joe K and he could only get one custodian to show up. We probably don't have the right man as our international union representative.

Chapter 13: The Political Scene

That city workers generally carry political talent is not a novel observation. Banfield and Wilson (1963) indicate that, in Los Angeles, the combined forces of city employees can decide the outcome of a municipal election. Boston in 1948 elected a former health department clerk mayor. If New York City had elected Paul Screvane mayor in 1965, this would have marked the first time a former sanitation worker had climbed to the top of the political pyramid. Of course, custodians are only one influential group among many. Winters (1969), in his study of educational decision-making in a small Massachusetts town, found that the Custodians Union is only one powerful group; it competes with school administrators, the Teachers Organization, and the Federation of Civic Organizations for Education. Royko (1971), in a recent biography of "Boss" Richard Daley, the mayor of Chicago, reports that the mayor appoints a labor leader to every policy-making city board or committee. Thus the president of the Janitors' Union was on the police board, the park board, the public buildings commission, and a number of others. In addition:

> The big unions came through for Daley, with William McFetridge of the Janitors' Union leading the way. They admitted to contributing a minimum of $215,000 for the primary and regular elections, an impressive sum for a city contest. They also brought in sound

> trucks, extra precinct workers, and printed more than a half million pieces of campaign literature. (Royko, 1971, p. 91).

Although we do not wish to imply that the school custodians of Bay City are the only--or even the major--influence on city politics, we focus on them in an effort to compensate for the dearth of information we have about their political activities. Surely the activities of other city employees are not inconsequential.

The following discussion of custodial politics in Bay City during 1969 is organized into two chapters. We begin with the political life of custodians: the "favors" they do for elected officials and candidates. We then discuss the "favors" local and state politicians do for the custodians.

Custodians as a group (through their Association) and as individuals, engage in political activity, perhaps to a greater extent than people in many other occupations. Their involvement is on both state and local levels. Generally speaking, the impetus behind custodial politics is the desire of custodians to control their environment and destinies. As one custodian put it:

> We are politically active because we want better conditions for ourselves and our schools.

It is obvious that they desire some degree of control over the bureaucracy (consisting of the chief schoolhouse custodian and his subordinate supervisors) which is responsible for supervising

their day-to-day work activities. The custodians also influence the bureaucratic structure that controls their work environment, the school buildings department. Additionally, they seek to have their recommendations for salary increases met. In these instances, maximum political influence is obtained through the manipulation of the Bay City School Board--that locally elected group of five citizens which controls public school policy.

In addition, custodians seek to increase their control over the vicissitudes of the non-work areas of their lives. To do this, they attempt to influence the Bay City Council and the Bay State legislature. Some aspects of their jobs are under the jurisdiction of the state legislature and this is another impetus for involvement in state politics.

Another arena of "political influences" involves "re-educating people at the top." It is these "Chamber of Commerce people" who control the "big money." If the custodians receive an increase in salary or benefits, the tax rate may have to be raised, and these people who are influential in economic and political circles must be persuaded that the shift is justified. The people "at the top" are also opinion leaders in the community, and therefore, if they are kindly disposed to custodians, they may influence others in the community to raise their evaluation of custodians.

Additionally, some custodians engage in political activity in order to indirectly increase their status. That is, low status

people sometimes find that they can raise the evaluation of their position in life by "hob-nobbing" or "rubbing elbows" with higher status people, such as politicians. Lastly, some political activity by custodians is a form of vocational or "hobby" behavior--a way to utilize their spare time in an enjoyable manner.

We will not define political influence precisely. We do not wish to restrict our observations by limiting attention to those actions of custodians which come under the rubric of one particular definition of political influence. Rather, we wish to consider as broad a range of phenomena as possible. Using a quite unsystematic perspective, we focus on the behaviors of custodians which are intended to give them some control over their job-related and extra-work destinies. They do this by establishing a relationship of mutual benefit between themselves and politicians: the custodians do "favors" for the politicians and the "favors" are reciprocated. Favors that the custodians can do for the politicians are clearly defined and understood by both custodians and politicians; the custodians campaign and raise money. On the other hand, the reciprocating behavior of the politicians is not clearly defined. As we will show, the role of the politicians vis a vis the custodian has also been circumscribed over the last few years by the expanded Civil Service system which has limited the possibilities for patronage.

We now ask two related questions: (1) "Are custodians

politically active?" and, (2) "How much political influence do they have?" The first question can be considered in its present form, but the second must be rephrased. Our interviews are directly relevant to the first question and to the following variation of the second question: "How much political influence do custodians and certain others believe custodians have?"

Custodians disagree on the answer to these two questions. Some hold that the extent of their political influence is exaggerated not only by themselves but also by others. Below is a documented instance of how a custodian in another city influenced school policy. Following this is the reaction of a typical Bay City custodian to the story.

> Another New England school center was nearly wrecked in the launching by an old janitor with a large local following who worked openly to discredit everything it did. He stood in the hallways and insulted the patrons; he locked school rooms and refused to open them even when ordered to do so by authority; and on occasion of the first big neighborhood gathering, he locked up the stereopticon and hid the cables, nearly breaking up the meeting. He boasted that the school authorities would not dare discipline him because he had too many friends in the neighborhood, and he was right. When the authorities threatened to try him under civil service rules, several prominent neighborhood leaders made a counter-threat to boycott the center. Personal loyalty was stronger than public spirit. The difficulty was solved for a time by the appointment, as supervisor, of a woman who had even a stronger neighborhood hold than the janitor. She knew her people and bided her time. One day when she had the trouble-maker conspicuously at a disadvantage, she suddenly turned on him with a tongue lashing that held him wild-eyed and speechless; when he turned to

> the neighborhood for sympathy, he found most of the sympathy already aligned on the other side. But a year later the supervisor married. Her successor knew nothing of the neighborhood line-up; the janitor easily worsted him and disrupted the center again. (Barrows, 1923)

The reaction of one Bay City custodian to this story:

> There is a myth about the political power of custodians. People think that he has some kind of power just because he knows everyone in the neighborhood, but this is not true today. Today, you just drive up to the school building and get out of your car. You don't get to know the people who live around the school.

However, earlier we presented evidence that, at least in certain schools, the custodians do become known to the people in the neighborhood. Some custodians indicate that the decline of local custodial influence is related to the movement of custodians outside of the city itself:

> Custodians aren't strong enough to knock out a politician [i.e., to prevent his election] because many of them don't vote in city elections. Many custodians are beginning to move out of Bay City. As the Irish and Italians continue to move out, the Negroes may be able to put people in office.

There is an incredible degree of misinformation in this statement. According to the Chief custodian, more than 80 per cent of the custodians live in Bay City! Some custodians simply will not admit to any political activity:

I am not interested in politics.

> We are entitled to go to the School Board meetings, but they don't tell us when they are. I don't think custodians are politically active. Most of them are in the dark. I guess they are just lazy.

Gus G, secretary-treasurer of the Custodians' Association, estimates that one out of nine custodians are active politically and will work for the election of candidates. He believes that this represents altruistic behavior on the part of individual custodians: "they gain nothing for themselves." If we accept Gus' figures, this means that there are about 45 custodians acting politically on their own initiative--not as representatives of other custodians or the Association. As we will show later, there is abundant evidence that individual custodians and their families campaign and raise funds for politicians.

In addition, custodians as a group, through their Association officers, are active politically. One officer of the Association, listing the good points of his job, said:

> One of the best parts of the job is dealing directly with the School Board because they are wonderful people.

The officers of the Association attend School Board meetings to:

> See what affects us. We meet other political people there and shoot the breeze. We meet representatives from the city council and if we have a [association] meeting we invite them to speak.

Many of the custodians interviewed feel that their Association officers are involved in politics in order to play the role of "big shots" and mingle socially with politicians. Political candidates and incumbents do attend Association meetings and banquets in order to ask for votes and assistance in their campaigns.

Some custodians challenge the role, importance, and motives of the Association and its officers as political agents:

> The Association has a reputation for having a powerful political organization. This is blown out of all proportion. At each election they always come out for the old School Board members who are up for re-election. If they get in, people think that you put it over and this is not true.

> Custodians as a group don't help anyone get elected to the School Board. A few custodians work for candidates because they have an ax to grind and they are ambitious to get better jobs. [But I thought that there weren't any important jobs that members of the School Board could get for a custodian?] Well, you know, hope springs eternal, because they rarely get a better job after all that work.

> Over the years it's mainly been the Association officers who are politically active. The Association was started by the juniors but the seniors took it over and run it for themselves. They argue only for themselves and want to run the show. They're in it to get ahead.

A few custodians emphasize their disunity when it comes to choosing a candidate for whom to campaign:

> The association tells its members to vote one way and they don't necessarily do it.

For example, I interviewed one custodian who actually voted for Mrs. B (a citizens reform candidate) for School Board in the last election. She was labeled by the association as "the arch enemy of custodians" because she said that if elected she would spend more money for the academic house (the academic aspects of education) and appropriate less money for custodial services. When I asked this junior custodian why he voted for her, he replied:

> Once she is on the Board she will learn about what's going on and then probably she will be very sympathetic to us. A woman would be more understanding about our problems than a man.

I asked Gus G what he thought about custodians who supported Mrs. B and he said, "They must be soft in the head." Other custodians recognize the diversity of opinion among themselves when it comes to supporting candidates:

> Custodians as a group do not fight for a candidate because it is very difficult to get them to agree with each other. I worked for C [for state representative] because he lives down the block from me and he's my friend. But he can't help me out, he's just a friend.

It has long been rumored in Bay City that custodians are more politically active than other groups associated with the schools. Custodians are quite sensitive about these allegations, and this is illustrated by the defensiveness of one former president of the Association:

> Sure we work for political candidates. Why not? This is a democracy isn't it? We have free speech here. In a free country, everyone has a right to help the candidate of their choice. Teachers get into politics, so why can't we?

As can be seen in the above quotation, the custodians are quick to compare themselves with teachers. They take pride in the fact that they will actively help favored candidates, whereas teachers who are more negative, limit their political activities to working against candidates:

> While the custodians can help a candidate, they can't hurt him. The teachers can really zing a candidate for the School Board if they don't like him. They /teachers/ can stay at the polls after school. They know the mothers and tell them who to vote for. But custodians don't know the parents and so can't do that. The teachers almost lost Joe L the election /for School Board/.

> Teachers are not politically active. They take the negative side, but only if you hurt them. If you cross them, they can wipe you out of office. But teachers never help you. Even if they like you, they won't put bumper stickers on /their cars/.

Politicians recognize the help and support that custodians give. They see custodians as both loyal and helpful. Albert O, a candidate for the City Council, in an interview at the annual custodians' Association banquet, referred to their loyalty and helpfulness:

> They stick together. If you're interested in any public life, they are a wonderful organization to have

> with you. They stay right with you, there's no breaking either. They're good people. They have this party once a year and we always have a wonderful time. They're the kind of a group, that if you need them, boy, they're right there. Loyalty is the word.

Politicians appreciate the help of custodians. At the Association dinner several political figures who were guest speakers had this to say about the help and loyalty the custodians had given them in the past:

> I know in the past you have been good to me. (John K, Chairman of the Bay City School Board)
>
> You've been wonderful to me and I shall never forget you. (Frederic L, Bay City Councilman)
>
> Thank you very much for your support in the past. (Paul T, Bay City School Board Member)
>
> I thank you very much for your support in the past. (Paul McD, Bay City School Board Member)
>
> I never, never would miss coming to your party because I think so much of you and we've been friends for a long time. When I needed you, you were always there. (Mrs. L. D. H., former Bay City School Board member)
>
> He (Tom E, former School Board member and now Sheriff) appreciates what you have done for him in the past. (Jerry M, former State Representative, Ward 17)

Politicians attend the Annual Custodians' Banquets for several reasons. In the first place, while one custodian quoted above believed that his group could not get an office holder elected, they nevertheless have an important political impact, although it is

difficult to measure precisely. Particularly in off-year, local elections where voter turnout is low, political activity by custodians could make the difference between election and defeat. It is therefore not surprising to find political figures at the annual Association banquet expressing their appreciation for the help of custodians.

Another reason that political figures attend the Annual Custodian's Banquet is that it provides them a live audience of over 600 people:

> who he can talk to and sell himself to. There will be over 600 people at the banquet. If someone is running for governor, he probably won't address a group larger than this, and he knows some will offer to help.
>
> Of course many custodians are going for the free roast beef dinner and aren't interested in hearing any politicians. But they are a polite audience, and the politicians appreciate this. They are courteous. Once the teachers booed a certain political figure at their banquet. Custodians would never do this.

The custodians recognize the importance of their banquets as political platforms, especially for Democratic candidates. Comments like these are heard frequently among custodians:

> Last year all the custodians who wanted to go to the banquet couldn't fit in. Too many outsiders showed up to hear the political speechers.
>
> If E were running for re-election to the School Board he would come up from Florida for the banquet [where he was vacationing!]

> /Former/ Governor P went right from a White House conference to our annual dinner. He called us "king-makers."

Many politicians make their "pitch" at the Annual Custodian's Banquet. Albert C, for example, announced his candidacy for the City Council; former Lieutenant Governor Frank B hinted that he might run again ("If I get into the position again, there are some changes I would like to make in the collective bargaining law"). There, politicians make promises about what they will do for custodians in the future and recount what they have done in the past. If they fail to do this, the toastmaster supplies the required information while introducing them to the custodians. We now examine in detail the ways in which custodians help politicians (Chapter 14) and the favors political figures do for custodians (Chapter 15).

Chapter 14: How Custodians Help Politicians

As we mentioned earlier, custodians return favors or earn them from politicians by helping in campaigning and fund-raising. Individually, and collectively through the Association, custodians help candidates raise money by purchasing tickets for benefit and testamonial dinners. A custodian explains that often the treasury of the association makes the purchase:

> It happens this way. A School Board member sends the tickets to the Association. Someone at the [Association] meeting makes a motion for the treasury to buy the benefit tickets. It is voted on and it is usually accepted. Usually the Board member sends the association 50 tickets at ten dollars each. Then they give the tickets out to the men for free.

Fifty tickets at $10 each comes to $500, and a sum of money this large is not easy for a local political candidate to collect. The Association does not always buy such a large number of tickets; sometimes only ten or fifteen. For example, recently the treasury received and purchased ten tickets at $15 each for the birthday dinner given Paul T, a member of the School Board.

The custodians invite candidates to address them at Association meetings. Sometimes the association offers a $100 door prize to boost attendance. If a candidate is accepted by the men, he may gain anywhere from 50 to 300 votes depending on the size of his audience. And if the custodians tell their friends to vote, a

candidate can amass quite a few votes in a single evening. These relatively few votes may not seem very important, but compared to the low number of votes cast in School Board elections, they may be crucial.

Political candidates and incumbents often seek counsel about local and neighborhood public opinion from the officers of the Association. Gus G offers some details:

> H [candidate for mayor], C [candidate for Sheriff], and L [candidate for School Board] asked me for political advice. They want to know what to say in a certain section of town, where to go to speak, what the problems are in the various neighborhoo[d]. For example, in a certain area they may have a problem about garbage disposal or the building of a new rapid transit yard. I find people who live in these neighborhoods and find out what their problems are. This is very important because it can ruin a candidate if he says the wrong thing at a rally. For example, H made a mistake asking for more money for police. This may have lost her the election for Mayor. If she had asked me, I would have told her that firemen have most of the public sympathy. This may have ruined her. Before her speech, she was running ten percent ahead of the other candidates. The day after her statement people took her stickers off their houses and she lost the election by only three percent. Often the politicians ask us to help them line up political talks and to introduce them to people in a neighborhood.

Candidates do not always follow the advice of the custodians. For example, Gus G explains why Mrs. H lost the mayoral election by a small margin:

> She really made a mistake by saying "you know where I stand" in her speeches. She means that the voters

> will know where she stands on school bussing and integration. I advised her not to say this because she will appear as a bigot and will not appeal to the better class of people.

We can see that the politicians do not always follow the advice of the Association officers, but they certainly listen to their information about voter attitudes, neighborhood problems, and solicit their introductions to people in various neighborhoods.

Individual custodians also buy tickets for benefits given by and for candidates for office. They enjoy going to these dinners because:

> Ten years ago we had to go to City Hall to pick up our pay and we saw our friends there and got to know them. Now we see them at parties and banquets. If the tickets are expensive we only buy one and we go by ourselves and leave our wives at home.

Custodians are effective and diligent political campaigners. They have "house parties" to which a candidate and friends are invited. There, a candidate will give a short speech and then socialize with the guests who are personal friends of the custodian. At the Annual Association Banquet, I interviewed the wife of a custodian who held a house party for Mrs. H several years ago when she was a candidate for School Board. She held the party because: "Mrs. H is very close to the custodians, and when she first ran [for School Board] the Association officers helped her and solicited our votes." A house party costs on the average from $10 to $25 for coffee,

doughnuts, and other refreshments. Here a candidate has a chance to meet 40 or 50 people on an intimate basis, and the guests have a chance to socialize with an "important" person. Recently, with greater access to television, house parties have become less popular, although they have not disappeared, by any means. At the association banquet I overheard the wife of a custodian speaking to Albert O, candidate for City Council. She said that she wanted to have a house party for him sometime in the near future. He was very gracious and cooperative, and they set a date.

Custodians point out that they are more effective campaigners than teachers partly because they are willing to spend money for house parties:

> Teachers are not as liberally minded with their money as custodians. They wouldn't spend $10 or $25 for a house party because they're cheap.

Because custodians are "joiners," they have a wide range of contacts whom they can use to "push" or "tout" candidates. They are members of such organizations as the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Elks, and the Knights of Columbus. They "talk up" candidates to their friends, give them bumper stickers for their cars, and tell them such things as:

> Why don't you vote for Toni S for State Rep. [Representative]? You know, he's pro labor, and he carries a longshoreman's card. I went to high school with him and he's a good guy.

> You know, R is always available at the State House to speak to any of us and listen to our problems.

One reason for the effectiveness of custodians at this kind of "selling" is the high personal regard in which they are held by their friends and neighbors:

> We custodians have a good image and our friends and neighbors like us.

There are other reasons for their effectiveness as political campaigners, especially when compared to teachers. Fifty per cent of the Bay City teachers live outside of the city compared to twenty per cent of the custodians. In addition, in the evenings, many teachers are either at home preparing lessons for the next day or attending night school. The custodians, on the other hand, have more time to spend at meetings or clubs talking about candidates.

As we pointed out above, custodians are effective and diligent campaigners. In local elections, especially in "off years" when voter turn-out is low, the several thousand votes of custodians and their friends may make the difference between success and defeat. Custodians put bumper stickers on their cars and give them out to their friends. The custodian is "one of the few who will get his ass up a tree to post a campaign sign that no one can knock down." They take days off from work without pay and spend their evenings standing at the polls, putting up signs, and knocking on

doors. Their families work with them at candidates' headquarters, helping with the paperwork, addressing and stuffing envelopes, answering telephones, and soliciting votes over the telephone. Their daughters help with secretarial work.

The custodians' efforts to collect the 2,000 signatures for the nominating petitions of School Board candidates are as important, if not more important, than their electioneering. Joe L, a candidate for re-election to the Bay City School Board, had 15 custodians helping him get the necessary signatures:

> Custodians often belong to the Knights of Columbus Order or to a veterans lodge, such as the VFW /Veterans of Foreign Wars/ or the /American/Legion. On a Friday night a man can go down and collect 200 or more signatures personally. That's about two sheets of the twenty needed.

Candidates for local and state office are invited to the testimonial dinners and annual banquets given by the Custodians' Association. It is not unusual for the Mayor and Governor to attend. School Board members rarely miss these functions and usually address the group, stressing the outstanding work of the custodians and appreciation for their support. The candidates and the Association officers sit at a dais in the front of the room. Dinner is served, and after the speeches the custodians and their wives and friends dance to the music of a band. At the annual Association banquet held in May, 1969, the politicians, Association leaders, and a

newspaper reporter retired to the "VIP Room." Drinks sold in the dining room were free for these "VIP's." The guests and Association officers socialized and "talked shop" in the VIP Room before and after the dinner which was served in the more impersonal and crowded dining room. The annual Association banquet provides the political speaker with a live, courteous, and potentially helpful audience of more than 600 people. In addition, since these dinners are considered "newsworthy" events, the local press is there to photograph and interview the politicians.

The attendance of high ranking public officials at custodians' banquets shows that they are quite aware of the significance of these functions. The following Bay City political officials were "head table guests" and speakers at a testimonial dinner given for Gus G, the secretary-treasurer of the Custodians' Association: the Mayor, the five-member School Board, the County Sheriff, one City Councilman, the Chairman of the Bay City Licensing Board, and a former School Board member who unsuccessfully ran for Mayor. These state officials also attended the dinner: the State Attorney General, two State Representatives, three State Senators, the County Commissioner, the Clerk of the County Courthouse, the County Sheriff, and the State Registrar of Motor Vehicles. The annual Association banquet held in May, 1969, was attended by these local officials: one City Councilman, the Chairman of the City Licensing Board, four members of the School Board, and one former School Board member and

unsuccessful candidate for Mayor. The state government was represented by: the former Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House, one State Senator, one State Representative, and a member of the County Sheriff's office representing the Sheriff.

These guests lavish praise on the custodians for their loyalty and help. In an interview at the annual custodians' banquet, Albert O, candidate for City Council, characterized custodians as "good, loyal people." Fred L, a member of the Bay City Council, said: "You've been wonderful to me and I shall never forget you. . . . I wouldn't miss this [banquet] for the world." The County Sheriff, a former member of the School Board, who could not attend the banquet sent an emissary who said that the Sheriff "asked me to come here and say hello to all his friends, and tell them that while he's not here at least he's here in spirit . . . he appreciates what you have done for him in the past." Mrs. H, a former member of the School Board and unsuccessful candidate for mayor, spoke warmly to the custodians, thanked them for their help, and promised her cooperation in the future:

> Let me say that I never, never, would miss coming to your party because I think so much of you and we've been friends for a long time. When I needed you, you were always there. And I trust that when you need me, that I shall be there too. For I feel very deeply about you and your problems, you truly are the greatest. And may I say, that it's been a pleasure to serve on the Bay City School Board and anything that I ever can do for you, you know you only have to ask. In fact, fellas, you know where I stand!

Some politicians compliment the custodians for their efforts on behalf of organized labor. For example, Frank B, the former Lieutenant Governor, said:

> I just wanted to say that I know you people were the first in collective bargaining in the state. . . . I am sure that you know my feelings on collective bargaining. I think that it can change the world.

Other government officials extol the custodians for joining with them in bearing and protecting the traditional values of Bay City and America. At the annual banquet, a former State Representative said: "I am happy, proud and delighted to be here this evening among my kind of people." "My kind of people" are the God-fearing, standard bearers of America's traditional way of life. A popular and long-standing member of the School Board, Joe L praised the custodians:

> I think it's safe to say that the custodians of Bay City carry the schools on their backs. I only wish they'd been looking after the schools across the river in Oxbridge during that silly uprising a few weeks ago [by the students at Oxbridge University] and I am sure they would have handled the situation, too. In fact, I think the students over there at Oxbridge University would have a great deal to learn from the custodians of Bay City in the way of sound values, plain decency, common sense, insight and wisdom, how this nation works, than they can learn from all their professors put together who seem to have only taught them to mess up their lives. But you couldn't turn the situation around, you couldn't have those Oxbridge University professors come and manage the Bay City schools the way you do, because they'd blow the place up!

In a campaign speech addressed to the custodians, Albert O, chairman of the Bay City Licensing Board and candidate for the City Council said:

> I'm running for the Bay City Council because I'm a little fed up with what's going on in this city that we all love. When I look out in the audience and see God-fearing people, the only thing you did all your lives was go out and work for it, you never asked for handouts--we're going to get some people who are going to say no to a lot of people who don't belong here. We're going to get some respect for law and order back in this city, and most of all we're going to get some respect for people that made this city and this state and this country what it is today. I'm asking for the opportunity to go in there and bring decency back in this city. God bless you and have a wonderful night.

Other politicians use the occasion of the custodians' banquet to donate money to the Custodians' Association. For example, Paul T, a member of the Bay City School Board, said:

> Through the generosity of the officers of /the/ Association, they offered to buy ten tickets to /a birthday reception for me/ at $15 a piece. I have their check with me this evening in the amount of a hundred and fifty dollars and I also have a check drawn on my personal account in the amount of a hundred and fifty dollars. I am going to turn both of them back to /the/ president /of the Association/, Mr. A, and ask that he consider it as the first contribution to the scholarship fund for deserving sons and daughters of the members of the Custodians' Association.

They also laud the officers and former officers of the Custodians' Association. The statements below were made by State Representative George K and Joe K, respectively:

> I'd like to salute . . . all of your officers over the years [who] have done a tremendous job, not only on your behalf, but on behalf of the school system in Bay City. I think it fitting that I salute my classmate, too . . . your new [Association] president, Mr. A.
>
> These two gentlemen, Gus G and John M [the secretary-treasurer of the Association and its former president, respectively] have contributed much to the movement of the Bay City Public School Custodians' Association. I think they have brought to bear the point that in organization there is strength. If you continue with that organization, I think that you will continue to move ahead in the future as you have in the past.

Many politicians make "important political announcements" at these banquets. For example, at the 1969 annual dinner, Albert O, Chairman of the Bay City Licensing Board, announced his candidacy for the City Council. Former Lieutenant Governor Frank B hinted that he might run for office again when he said, "If I get into the position again, there are some changes I would like to make in the collective bargaining law." Paul M, a member of the School Board, addressed the custodians:

> I thank you very much for your support in the past and to put down any sort of rumors that might be circulating, I am a candidate for re-election. I hope you will be with me in the future.

Chapter 15: How Politicians Help Custodians

We now turn to the "favors" that local and state officials exchange for the loyalty, financial support, and campaigning of the Bay City custodians. Most of the custodians point out that Civil Service regulations do not permit political interference in promotions and job transfers, and they are reluctant to admit any problems that require "outside" solutions. For example, the former president of the Custodians' Association said:

> What can the School Board do for us? Very little. They aren't helpful. We have no problems.

Custodians remain silent in response to persistent questioning by "outsiders." In his basement office, a custodian had just finished saying, "the School Board doesn't do much for the custodians," when an industrial arts teacher entered and said, "Bull shit! You're always saying that you have to grease the palm that feeds you." The embarrassed custodian replied, "There really isn't anything to gain." Another custodian, when asked what the School Board "does for" him, candidly said, "I won't say."

The custodians tell quite a different story, however, when they have had a few drinks in a convivial atmosphere with other custodians. At their annual banquet, the toastmaster, Gus G, said of the invited politicians: "Any of these people at the head table

tonight, believe me, if they weren't friends of ours, they wouldn't be here." He introduced State Representative Paul M as a "man who has been a very very good friend of custodians throughout the years, a very good friend." He presented Paul M, a member of the School Board, as "a local boy from the neighborhood, a friend of mine, a very close friend of mine." Albert O, Chairman of the Bay City Licensing Commission and candidate for City Council is " a very good good friend of ours"; State Representative George K "is another great friend of custodians over the years." Joe L, a popular and enduring member of the School Board is spoken of as a beloved and proven friend:

> I now have the privilege of presenting to you the gentleman many of you love, a real fine gentleman. He is in my estimation the "dean" of School Board members. He has devoted most of his life to conducting School Board business. He's up there. He don't vote for us all the time, and we respect him. He has in the past fought many times with us, many times against us, but he's continually fighting for the school kids of Bay City. A proven friend of ours, School Board member, Joe L.

Increased salaries and school building renovations are the rewards the School Board bestows on the custodians as a group. The custodians of Bay City are the highest paid school custodians in the state. The custodians attribute this to their political influence:

> If you want a ten dollar raise, if you have politically influential /Association/ officers, they can help push it through the School Board. Eight years ago they got us time-and-a-half for overtime.

At the annual custodians' banquet, Paul M, a member of the School Board, lists his reasons for supporting a high salary level for the custodians:

> Thank you, all of you, who work in the elementary schools and maintain discipline. Thank you, all of you, who when policemen aren't available have thrown intruders out of our schools. I'd like to thank each and everyone of you who have put up with the abuse and tirades of so-called liberals who come before me and say that a man who works for Bay City does not deserve a decent week's pay. You can be sure that I came here with a record of achievement in the past and that as long as I am on the School Board you will not be asked to work for nothing; you will not be asked to work for subsistence wages; you will be rewarded for the very fine service that you contribute to keep our school system going.

Paul T, a colleague on the Board "would like to pay public tribute" to those custodians who:

> would constantly remind members of the School Board that the custodians didn't work 4 or 5 hours a day--they worked 8 or more hours a day. They didn't work 180 days a year--they worked a full year.

The Board apparently believes that full-time workers, like custodians, deserve higher compensation than "part-time" city employees, such as teachers. The favored treatment of custodians at School Board meetings is apparent. At a recent meeting, for example, an issue concerning custodians had not been considered for weeks due to the busy schedule of the Board. One Board member demanded:

> These custodians have been coming to our meetings for several weeks waiting for us to consider this matter

> which is low on our agenda. They have been waiting for a long time and have been very patient. I demand that the Board attend to this item immediately.

The School Board recommends building renovations and the purchase of new equipment that makes the work of the custodians less demanding. For example, "Ten years ago, all of us [the custodians] were shoveling coal." In the last few years, the School Board has converted approximately one-third of the schools to oil heat, which is easier and cleaner to service. Paul T, a member of the School Board, "pays tribute" to the several custodians who "constantly reminded the School Board that even today, as well as [several years ago] many of you were still shoveling coal and trucking out barrels of ashes."

Individual custodians are also rewarded by grateful School Board members. The Board lightens the work load of a "helpful" custodian by "pushing" the School Buildings Department to repaint the interior of his school; newly painted walls are easy to clean. It is not unusual for a School Board member to "speak to someone" in the School Buildings Department to facilitate the delivery of equipment requisitioned by a custodian, such as new toilets or other items to "make the school a better building," that is, easier to clean.

The Board may increase the wages of a particular custodian by assigning his school to a higher salary step. Custodians in

schools that are difficult to clean because they are old or have large basements receive higher salaries than custodians in smaller schools with less work. The influential custodian can increase his pay by going:

> to the School Board to try to get more money for the same school. He can try to get the school a higher rating by telling them that it is getting older. Then the School Board takes a survey and they may or may not agree with him.

The custodian may use the same strategy to convince the School Board to assign additional custodians to the building, thus reducing each man's work load. The School Board appoints selected custodians to the "bouncing list" from which men are selected to replace higher salaried custodians on sick or vacation leave. Although these positions are temporary and open to the usual bidding procedures after 30 days, a custodian may increase his income considerably by bouncing from one vacancy to another, especially during the summer months when many men are on vacation.

The custodians must compete with the friends and relatives of the Board members for their patronage. Each Board member appoints ten "corridor guards" for schools that hold night classes. They receive ten dollars to patrol school hallways and keep out intruders and vandals. School Board members also designate custodians as paid ticket-takers at school baseball and basketball night games. Furthermore, members of the School Board appoint the friends and relatives

of custodians to fill temporary vacancies as school cafeteria workers. The Board appoints qualified sons and daughters of custodians as night and day school teachers, and then arranges their transfer from one school to another. They also hire the custodians' relatives for jobs in the Custodial Department. It is not unusual for a custodian's son to work in the Department while attending college or graduate school or for a custodian's brother to seek appointment as a custodian:

> If a custodian has a brother or a son and he is on the /Civil Service/ list, we can help him get an appointment as a custodian. /But I thought this was strictly Civil Service?/ According to Civil Service rules they can appoint any of the first three names on the list. You could go to K or E /School Board members/ and they will look for a way to put him on the job--as long as they are in the top three.

Several years ago, the School Board could place favored custodians at the School Board offices on Beacon Street or at the Truant Offices on Myrtle Street, which are higher paying buildings, but this was stopped, cutting off one of the major sources of School Board patronage.

Political influence can also help the custodian who "gets into trouble on the job." School Board members often intercede in disputes a custodian has with one of his four immediate supervisors or with the Head Custodian himself. For example, when one inebriated custodian was fined five days pay, an influential School Board member asked the Head Custodian to suspend his penalty. If a cus-

todian does not know a Board member personally, he may ask an Association officer or a former officer to speak with the Board on his behalf. One custodian offers an example:

> One supervisor has a chip on his shoulder. He won't stand up for us. Once he caught someone coming back late for lunch and he suspended him for the rest of the afternoon. So the custodian called an Association officer who went to the School Board member and had him straighten the whole mess out.

At the custodians' banquet, Paul T, a member of the School Board, describes how custodians asked favors of the Board:

> I would like to pay public tribute to three gentlemen whom I've had the pleasure of knowing for over ten years, dating back to the time when my brother Jack was on the School Board: Jimmy K, John M, and Mr. G [current and former officers of the Custodians' Association]. Back in those days it was not unusual to find one or more of them on a Saturday morning at my brother's house having a cup of coffee and discussing a grievance that one of the members [of the Association] might have had or a request for an extension of sick leave which was deserved.

Of the five members of the School Board, the custodians feel that three are sympathetic to their problems, although none will name these three. Three constitutes a majority on the Board, "so the Association gets three interested in our problems." Joe L, a member of the Board for many years, is mentioned often as the best friend the custodians ever had on the Board. Tom E, and Mrs. H, are also mentioned as former Board members who were favorably

disposed to custodians. At the other extreme, two former members of the school Board, Arthur G (an incumbent defeated in 1965), Isadore M, and Mrs. B, who recently ran unsuccessfully for the Board, are frequently mentioned as "the arch enemies of custodians."

When it comes to salary increases for custodians, the School Board is not more important than the City Council:

> The custodians lost ground over the years [in salary] compared to police and firemen because the budget is controlled by the Mayor. He is against us. He can chop down the School Board's request for salary increases for custodians in the budget. The City Council can't increase the budget, but they can put back what the Mayor took out. The Mayor doesn't like us, but the City Council tells him not to chop the budget too much when it comes to us. So why not work [campaign] for the City Council?

Some custodians who are not aware of how the final budget is computed consider the Mayor to be a friend; they believe he is responsible for their salary increases:

> Last year the Mayor got us a five dollar raise. This year? We'll wait and see. [Do custodians work harder for the Mayor or for the School Board?] We don't work as hard for the Mayor as we do for the School Board members.

In the past the City Council was "solidly" for the custodians. There is strong agreement among the respondents that of the nine City Council members, S and A are unsympathetic to their problems. Councilmen T and L are viewed as the most favorable, and they are deemed

sufficient support because "all you need are one or two [Councilmen] to talk up your problems to the others." Members of the City Council are particularly important for non-educational and non-work related favors. Custodians look to the City Council rather than the School Board in these areas because:

> The School Board can't help us in many outside areas because they are generally new in office and young and beginners in politics. They don't have the connections. The Council can help you get in a city hospital, straighten out a water bill or a tax problem.

In summarizing, there are five points to consider in evaluating the ways local officials help custodians:

(1) Because of Civil Service rules there is little that a "helpful" School Board member can do for an individual custodian in the areas of job transfer, changes in seniority, increases in salary.

(2) School Board members do have some patronage jobs to dispense, such as corridor guard; however, the custodian must compete for these jobs with the friends and relatives of the politician.

(3) The individual custodian may use his influence with the School Board to make his particular job better by having alterations made on his building, getting additional assistants assigned to his school, attaining a higher pay rating for his school, and interceding for him when he is chastized by his superiors.

(4) An individual custodian may call on members of the City Council and the School Board for certain"personal" favors involving other governmental agencies; for example, to "take care of" tax, judicial and other problems.

(5) The custodians work as a group through their Association officers to influence the School Board and City Council in order to obtain salary increases.

We must add, however, that the control of the Civil Service on promotion and seniority seems to be amenable to a bit of weakening through political pressure. Below, we discuss one recent incident where four men "jumped" ahead on the seniority list. This issue is very sensitive at this time, and most custodians either pretend to be unaware of it or refuse to talk about it. One informant described the situation in these words:

> Some of the politically active custodians, three or four men, suddenly jumped ahead on the seniority list. They claimed that they took the exam in 1942 or 1943 and they just now received credit for it! This was never published in the City Record [which publishes seniority lists and other information for all the city employees] and it was not published how or why they got ahead. They were helped.

Another custodian said:

> These four are a hot issue now. Many custodians will defend these four for having a true reason for jumping so as not to cause trouble and arguments among the men. One who jumped was a [former] head of the Association, so there is not much we can do about it. But the other heads of the Association have done little for themselves in this way.

One custodian was second on the seniority list before the four men jumped ahead of him. He will not, however, make an issue of the

matter because he does not want any of the positions for which the four are eligible. Another custodian defended the "jump." He believes the four to be victims of a "mix-up" which occurred in the early 1940's when the custodians transferred from the contract system to Civil Service. He explained that there was a midnight cut-off point for senior appointments. A meeting that evening was recessed because of the late hour and then reconvened. The meeting lasted until two o'clock the next morning, two hours past the cut-off. Some people were:

> Appointed to senior positions at this time. Because of the war [W. W. II] and other mix-ups they were never promoted. They have been fighting for this for twenty years and now they won. We have no right to take it away from them.

Other custodians mentioned the late night meeting. They do not, however, believe that these four men were appointed to the senior list at 2 a. m. They are cynical and express disbelief. These people were supposedly appointed twenty years ago. The reader may consider whether or not this incident represents an example of the use of political influence on the Civil Service system.

We now turn to the "favors" state officials, either individually or as a group in the legislature, do for custodians in return for campaigning and fund raising. The majority of the custodians interviewed have little interest in state politics and only vague ideas about the ways in which influence on the state level can help

them. One custodian knew the name of his state representative only because they both live in the same neighborhood and attend the same church. Another respondent believed that his fellow custodians give little help in campaigning to their state representatives, and a third custodian could not think of any legislation on the state level that might be favorable to his co-workers. At the same extreme is last year's association president who was not able to name any state representatives unsympathetic to the problems of custodians.

In the past, and to a lesser extent now, the State Legislature has not passed bills beneficial to custodians. The Bay City State House representatives are favorably disposed to the custodians but they are stymied by the larger number of representatives from other parts of the state. As more Bay City custodians move out of the city, they participate in a wider range of statewide elections. As non-residents of Bay City, they are ineligible to vote in city elections; they do, however, campaign for city candidates. Campaigning for state candidates does not conflict with campaigning for local candidates, because state and city elections are held in alternate years.

In their official capacity, state officials can do very little for the custodians as a group or individually. They cannot increase the salary of the custodians because they do not control the budget allocations of the Bay City school system. They cannot affect job tenure, promotion, etc., because most formal aspects of custodians'

jobs are carefully regulated by Civil Service rules which are open to public scrutiny.

There is, however, certain legislation that the custodians would like passed by the statehouse. Although the right of free petition exists in Bay State where any individual may file a bill through his state representative and:

> almost any state representative will sponsor a concrete bill, you have to have someone to take it out of committee, or it will die. In the old days, Representative P from Dorchester would help a good bill from us. He would listen to you and help you all he could. He was a good friend to custodians.

The "heart clause," for which the custodians had been fighting to get through the state legislature was rejected this past year by one vote, a smaller margin than in past years. One custodian described the heart clause and the reasons for its failure:

> The heart clause comes up every year but it always rejected. The police and firemen have it. If a custodian gets a heart attack on the job all he gets is sick pay for a while and then nothing. If a cop or a fireman gets a heart attack as a result of the job, he gets a pension according to the heart clause. A few custodians have gotten heart attacks on the job--you know it's more work than people think, with shoveling coal and all. They had to get lawyers and prove that the job aggravated the condition. The state reps [Representatives] outside Bay City are against the bill because it would cost the towns too much money.

The custodians would also like additional safety legislation

passed by the state legislature. Custodians are vulnerable not only to the more mundane accidents, such as falling off ladders, but to more serious dangers as well. For example, in the basements of some schools, high voltage relays are mounted on uninsulated fixtures. One custodian explained why additional safety laws have not been enacted:

> We need more state legislation on safety laws-- especially on the enforcement of the ones we already have. Towns and cities are exempt from some of these rules because of home rule. You see, under home rule, these laws are optional. In private industry, it's too expensive to have accidents, so they take measures to prevent them.

Other legislation that custodians consider necessary is as follows:

1. Time served in the military should count toward seniority and pensions.
2. Evening activities held in the schools should be reduced to fight vandalism.
3. Arm the custodians in certain dangerous schools and give them more protection.
4. Include overtime in pension computations.
5. Custodians should be paid for unused sick leave.

Most of the state legislation that the custodians have worked for or suggested has not been passed. Progress, however, is being made; Gus G believes that the next session of the legislature will pass the heart bill. A former president of the Association believes

that the Bay City custodians would be a more effective lobby on the state level if their Association was federated with the other custodian organizations in the state:

> We have had a tough job getting anything pushed through the state legislature, because there is no unity among the state's custodians. The state union is not helpful because no one organization has all the custodians in it.

Since the state legislature does not have jurisdiction or control over the salary schedules and promotion lists of the Bay City custodians, and since it has passed little legislation that favors the custodians, the reader may wonder how state officials reward the campaign contributions and help of custodians. This question cannot be answered without discussing the career of Gus G. Gus G is the custodian most active, influential, and respected in political circles in Bay City. He is the very visible organizer and Master of Ceremonies at the custodians' annual banquets. Gus began his political career working for the election of candidates to the Bay City Council and to the Statehouse. Later, he worked hard for the election of Governor P, and as a reward, he "went from the city to the county payroll." He is now on a one-year leave of absence from the Custodian Department to serve as Assistant Superintendent of the County Courthouse. As one of the assistant secretaries for patronage to the Governor, he sorts requests for temporary jobs and admission of custodians' relatives to state hospitals or state

colleges.

In the course of his political career, Gus G has met and befriended many political appointees and elected officials: heads of hospitals and licensing bureaus, officials in the tax, motor vehicle, water, parks, highway, judicial, and city personnel departments. Gus, then, is the man to contact for a personal favor or some special consideration from a city or state department. He sees his role in this way:

> I try to help custodians cut through the red tape in any way I can. Suppose someone has a mother who has to enter the state hospital, and she wants to get in a few days early. I call the president of the Senate or his State Rep. [Representative] to see if they can get her in a few days early. We can also do things for a custodian's son or daughter. [Like what?] Oh, maybe they want to find out something about a state school, or maybe they have had their driver's license suspended, maybe we can do something for them.

Custodians need not use an intermediary like Gus or a former officer of their Association to ask a state official for a favor. Some custodians personally contact their State Representatives to "cut through the red tape" of government departments. State officials make themselves readily available to the custodians. Gus explains that State Representative Joe W "has always been right there on the line whenever we needed him in the Statehouse." Frank B listened to the custodians when he held state office: "When I was Lieutenant Governor and John M and Gus [Association officers]

used to come up there, I did whatever I could." A spokesman for the County Sheriff says that the Sheriff "appreciates what /custodians/ have done for him in the past /and/ he has tried to reciprocate; he will continue to reciprocate at any time . . . in our offices at the County Courthouse."

PART V: CONCLUSION

Chapter 16: Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

We have seen that as a result of status dilemma and lack of respect from teachers, administrators, and others, the career of the Bay City Public School custodian is characterized by horizontal mobility. He typically transfers to or bids for schools which he believes (salary and other inducements notwithstanding) will provide satisfactory staff and community relations. Although not as frequent a career pattern, some custodians will adjust to the existing situation by re-training teachers or avoiding them rather than bidding off the schools.

We have also examined the political careers of the Bay City Public School custodians, another mode of response to status dilemma and its resulting lack of respect. Individually, and as a group through their Association, custodians campaign effectively and assiduously for politicians. They earn political influence which they exchange for some measure of control over their working conditions, benefits, the Custodial Department, and their lives in general. Although we still have a great deal to learn about blue-collar power and the extent to which boards of education respond to nonmonetary as well as salary and welfare demands, we would like

to put forward two tentative hypotheses suggested by Professor Joseph Cronin at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. First the lower the socioeconomic status of the school electorate, the more influential the custodian may be in school decision-making even in other than salary matters. Second, the more powerful the custodian in electoral campaigns, the less likely a board of education is to make decisions on the basis of educational issues as opposed to the impact on worker welfare. We look forward to future findings.

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APPENDIX

Letter of Introduction from New York City Local 32B of the Building Services Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, to the Bay City Custodians

Appendix: Letter of Introduction from New York Local 32B of the Building Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, to the Bay City Custodians

LOCAL 32B BUILDING SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION AFL CIO
1 EAST 33 STREET NEW YORK 16, N. Y. OREGON 9-1288

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

THOMAS SHORTMAN
President

ARTHUR L. HARCKHAM
Secretary-Treasurer

THOMAS G. YOUNG
Vice President

RICHARD CANCELLERE
Secretary

January 28, 1969

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is intended to introduce David M. Rafky, who worked his way through college as a member of Local 32B, Service Employees International Union.

He is now attending the graduate school of education at Harvard University. He is interested in the problems of Custodians and would like to learn more about their jobs.

In order to gain more knowledge about custodians, David would like to interview you. It is my hope that you will cooperate with him as much as possible.

Very truly yours,

Thomas Shortman

Thomas Shortman
President

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